

# **Societal Relevance as Success Factor of TV Series: The Creators' Perception**

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
of the University of Zurich  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
by  
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Accepted in the Spring Term 2019  
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Zurich, 2019

## Abstract

Media mediate societally relevant messages in formats that disseminate information. However, the communication of ideas and opinions on societal issues also takes place in entertainment formats such as fictional TV series. Furthermore, mediation in entertainment is often regarded as more effective than dissemination through information formats, (also) due to the evading of recipients' selection barriers. The importance of investigating TV series bases on the format's large narrative space that enables the communication and repetition of ideas and messages and on the format's popularity with audiences and, consequently, with broadcasters.

Countless different influences shape the composition of TV series' content and the inclusion of societally relevant messages. One potentially very important reason for incorporating specific messages and content elements in TV series is the extent to which decision-makers regard societal relevance as a success factor. The present study investigates the creators' perception of what societal relevance as a content element of TV series consists of, and to what extent they perceive these elements as a factor in the success of TV series.

Questions about the decision-making about content logically precede the investigation of the perceptions of content and messages in TV series and their contribution to success. The present study thus first investigates which factors constrain and enable the creative work on TV series in the creators' perception. The influences on the content of TV series are assigned to five levels of a conceptual hierarchical model by Shoemaker and Reese (2014): the levels of the social system, social institution, organization, routines and the individual.

The data are gathered in in-depth interviews with thirty-five elite respondents, thirty-two creators (writers, producers, developers) and three industry experts. The analysis method is qualitative content analysis with inductive category development and deductive category application. The data are subjected to descriptive, qualitative-quantitative salience analysis and qualitative comparative analysis.

The results show that the factors on the most salient organization level are multi-faceted and enable slightly more than they constrain the creation of TV series. On three levels, more constraining than enabling factors are found. On the more macro levels, the radical changes in the media landscape and the market for TV series exert influences that enable in various ways and constrain creation and mediation in other respects. Most intensely discussed are the influences on the meso and micro levels that are exerted by commissioning organizations, production teams, and individual writers, producers and developers in the service of broadcasters.

Controversial topics are regarded as societally relevant and are the most prominent category of topics in the data. This category also contributes most to the success of TV series in the eyes of the interviewees. Cultural proximity of content and target audience is societally relevant and is a success factor in, mainly, smaller markets, according to the creators. Most respondents label realism as societally relevant and it is a success factor to a fair share of the interview participants. Social and socio-political issues are societally relevant and are marginal success factors in

the data. Portrayals of politics and politicians are societally relevant but hardly contribute to (audience) success. Of all the main social segregators, the portrayal of gender (women) is a prominent societally relevant issue that can also, according to a share of the respondents, further success. Less salient societally relevant topics in TV series are treatments of ethnicity, class and sexuality. Interviewees seldom connect these topics to success.

Ideal types are distilled in the present study by extrapolation of emerging tendencies in the data. The types condense findings and inform further on the creators' perceptions of influences on content and societal relevance as success factor. Six ideal types emerge in the data: the audience servant, the crafter, the salesperson, the messenger, the paymaster servant, and the artist. In a comparison across subsamples of countries, business models of broadcasters, and functions in creation, strong variations in the salience of ideal types appear.

In conclusion, factors related to the commissioning organization are the strongest determinants of the content of TV series. TV series remain, however, a people business in which influential individuals have room to maneuver. Decision-making is, to an extent, based on potentially invalid information pertaining to the perception of broadcasters' and audiences' demands. The respondents display varying interpretations of societal relevance and the success of TV series. Societal relevance is a conditional success factor of TV series and is an ingredient of routes to audience success.

## Table of Content

Table of Figures .....	XIII
List of Tables .....	XIV
1. Introduction and Research Questions .....	1
1.1. Introduction .....	1
1.2. Study Overview.....	3
1.3. Research Questions .....	4
1.4. Definitions, Interpretations and Demarcations .....	5
1.4.1. Media: Institution, Systems, Types, Sectors.....	5
1.4.2. Levels of Analysis.....	5
1.4.3. Media Content, Texts, Creators .....	6
1.4.4. TV Series, Narratives.....	7
1.4.5. TV Production and Broadcasting as Cultural Industry .....	7
1.4.6. TV Series as Popular Culture .....	7
1.4.7. Societal Relevance.....	8
I Literature Review .....	9
2. Introduction to the Literature Review.....	9
3. Communication Science Framework.....	12
3.1. Approaches to Study of Media and Communication.....	12
3.2. Relevant Theory, Models, Perspectives .....	13
3.3. The Main Media-Society Theories .....	15
3.4. Media, Power, Society .....	16
3.5. Features of the Institution Media.....	17
3.6. Problems of 'Cultural Industries' .....	18
3.7. Media Organizations, Decision-Making.....	19
3.8. Media Workers, Typologies .....	21
4. Relevance of TV Series and Messages .....	25
4.1. Significance of TV Series .....	25
4.2. Mediation in TV Series .....	26
4.3. Audience Effects of Messages .....	27
5. Influences on Content of TV Series.....	30
5.1. The "Hierarchy of Influences Model" .....	31
5.2. The "Structure of Perceived Influence" on Media Content .....	33

5.3.	Deployment of Conceptual Models of Influences on Content of TV Series ....	34
5.4.	The Social System Level Influences on TV Series.....	34
5.4.1.	Conceptual Factors .....	34
5.4.2.	Societal Subsystems .....	35
5.4.3.	Summary .....	35
5.5.	The Social Institution Level Influences on TV Series.....	36
5.5.1.	Conceptual Factors .....	36
5.5.2.	Developments in Cultural Industry TV .....	36
5.5.3.	The Media/TV Landscape.....	38
5.5.4.	Public Service Broadcasting in the Media Landscape .....	43
5.5.5.	Additional Influences.....	45
5.5.6.	Summary .....	46
5.6.	The Organization Level Influences on TV Series .....	47
5.6.1.	Conceptual Factors .....	47
5.6.2.	Business Models.....	48
5.6.3.	Public Service Broadcasting Organizations .....	49
5.6.4.	Advertising-Based TV .....	52
5.6.5.	Pay-TV .....	54
5.6.6.	Additional Influences.....	56
5.6.7.	Summary .....	57
5.7.	The Routines Level Influences on TV Series .....	58
5.7.1.	Conceptual Factors .....	58
5.7.2.	Work by Teams .....	58
5.7.3.	Narration Routines .....	60
5.7.4.	‘Quality TV’ as Meta-Genre .....	61
5.7.5.	Summary .....	62
5.8.	The Individual Level of Influences on TV Series.....	63
5.8.1.	Conceptual Factors .....	63
5.8.2.	Writers, Producers, Showrunners .....	64
5.8.3.	Summary .....	66
5.9.	Overview: Influences on Content of TV Series.....	66
5.10.	Influences on Content: Research Goals .....	67
6.	Societally Relevant Content of TV Series .....	68

6.1. 'Societal Relevance' .....	68
6.2. Portrayal by Stereotypes .....	69
6.3. Realism as Content Element and Attribute .....	71
6.4. The Portrayal of Gender.....	72
6.4.1. Portrayals of Women on TV .....	72
6.4.2. Portrayals of Women: Feminist Perspectives .....	73
6.4.3. Portrayals of Women in TV Series: Case Studies .....	74
6.5. The Portrayal of Ethnicities .....	77
6.5.1. Portrayals of African Americans .....	77
6.5.2. Portrayals of African Americans in TV Series: Case Studies.....	79
6.5.3. Intersections of Stereotypes: African American Women .....	82
6.5.4. Stereotypes of African American Men .....	83
6.5.5. African Americans and Comedy .....	84
6.5.6. Portrayal of Other Ethnicities .....	85
6.5.7. Stereotypes of Asian Americans.....	85
6.6. The Portrayal of Class.....	86
6.6.1. Class and Society .....	86
6.6.2. Class in Media .....	87
6.6.3. Class in TV Series.....	88
6.7. The Portrayal of Sexuality.....	92
6.8. Political Content and Portrayals of Politics.....	93
6.8.1. Political Content.....	94
6.8.2. TV Series on Politics .....	94
6.9. The Portrayal of Controversial Topics .....	96
6.9.1. Controversial Topics in TV Series: Case Studies.....	97
6.9.2. The Portrayal of Drugs.....	98
6.10. Societal Relevance as Success Factor of TV Series .....	99
6.11. Overview: Societally Relevant Content of TV Series.....	100
6.12. Societal Relevance: Research Goals.....	102
7. Success Factors of TV Series .....	103
7.1. Content as Success Factor of TV Series .....	103
7.2. Generic Success Factors.....	103
7.2.1. Form/Design .....	103

7.2.2.	Environmental Orientation .....	104
7.2.3.	Internal Processes .....	104
7.2.4.	Organizational Facets.....	104
7.2.5.	Leadership .....	104
7.2.6.	Human Resources.....	105
7.2.7.	Marketing.....	105
7.2.8.	Distribution.....	105
7.2.9.	External Evaluation .....	105
7.3.	Measurement of Success of Media Products.....	105
7.4.	Overview: Success Factors and Success of TV Series.....	106
7.5.	Success Factors: Research Goals .....	106
II	Method.....	108
8.	Method and Sample .....	108
8.1.	Research Methods, Elements, Sequence .....	108
8.2.	Data Gathering: Interviews .....	109
8.3.	Sample .....	111
8.4.	Qualitative Content Analysis .....	113
8.5.	Development and Application of Category Systems.....	115
8.6.	Salience and Ideal Types.....	118
8.7.	Reliability and Validity .....	119
III	Results.....	121
9.	The Creators' Perception of Influences on Content of TV Series .....	121
9.1.	Prominence of Perceived Influences on Content.....	121
9.2.	Salience of Perceived Constraining and Enabling Influences on TV Series ..	121
9.3.	The Perceived Social System Level Influences on TV Series' Content.....	123
9.3.1.	Introduction and Conceptual Factors .....	123
9.3.2.	Political Subsystem Influences.....	123
9.3.2.1.	Partisan Media Politics and Interventionism .....	123
9.3.2.2.	Political-Ideological Zeitgeist .....	124
9.3.2.3.	Socio-Cultural/Political Environment .....	125
9.3.3.	Cultural Subsystem Influences: Trends and Zeitgeist.....	125
9.3.3.1.	Cultural Trends.....	125
9.3.3.2.	Culture and Audience Needs .....	126

9.3.4.	Overview: Perceived Social System Level Influences .....	127
9.4.	The Perceived Social Institution Level Influences on TV Series' Content .....	128
9.4.1.	Introduction and Conceptual Factors .....	128
9.4.2.	The TV Series Landscape .....	128
9.4.3.	Market Developments.....	129
9.4.4.	TV Series' Costs and Dependency on Financiers .....	131
9.4.5.	Advertising .....	132
9.4.6.	Audiences .....	132
9.4.7.	Media Policy .....	133
9.4.8.	Overview: Perceived Social Institution Level Influences .....	133
9.5.	The Perceived Organization Level Influences on TV Series' Content.....	135
9.5.1.	Introduction and Conceptual Factors .....	135
9.5.2.	Perception of Influences of Organizations .....	136
9.5.3.	Business Models.....	138
9.5.3.1.	Advertising-Based TV.....	140
9.5.3.2.	Public Service Broadcasters .....	141
9.5.3.3.	Pay-TV.....	143
9.5.4.	Goals, Mandates.....	144
9.5.5.	Policies, Power, Control.....	145
9.5.5.1.	Perspective of Writers and Producers .....	145
9.5.5.2.	Perspective of Broadcasters .....	147
9.5.6.	Budget of TV Series .....	147
9.5.7.	Target Audiences .....	149
9.5.8.	Advertisers.....	151
9.5.9.	Overview: Perceived Organization Level Influences .....	152
9.6.	The Perceived Routines Level Influences on TV Series' Content .....	154
9.6.1.	Introduction and Conceptual Factors .....	154
9.6.2.	Creation as Process.....	154
9.6.3.	Creation by Teamwork .....	156
9.6.4.	Roles in Creative Teams.....	157
9.6.5.	Decision-Making in Teams.....	158
9.6.6.	Genres, Types and Audience Needs .....	159
9.6.7.	Sources of Material .....	161



9.6.8.	Overview: Perceived Routines Level Influences.....	161
9.7.	The Perceived Individual Level Influences on TV Series' Content .....	163
9.7.1.	Introduction and Conceptual Factors .....	163
9.7.2.	Individual Influences on Content by Function .....	164
9.7.2.1.	Writers.....	164
9.7.2.2.	The Epitome of Power: Showrunners.....	165
9.7.2.3.	Other Influential Roles: Developers, Producers .....	166
9.7.3.	Individual Influences on Content by Country .....	167
9.7.3.1.	Denmark, Scandinavia.....	167
9.7.3.2.	The United Kingdom .....	168
9.7.3.3.	Canada .....	169
9.7.3.4.	Italy .....	169
9.7.3.5.	Germany .....	170
9.7.3.6.	Belgium and The Netherlands.....	170
9.7.3.7.	Switzerland.....	171
9.7.4.	Audience Considerations of Creators.....	171
9.7.5.	Overview: Perceived Individual Influences on Content.....	172
10.	The Creators' Perception of Success Factors of TV series .....	174
10.1.	Perception of Content as Success Factor .....	174
10.2.	Salience of Meta-Categories of Success Factors.....	175
10.3.	Perception of Additional Success Factors .....	175
10.3.1.	Form/Design.....	176
10.3.2.	Environmental Orientation .....	176
10.3.3.	Internal Processes .....	176
10.3.4.	Organizational Facets.....	177
10.3.5.	Leadership .....	178
10.3.6.	Human Resources.....	178
10.3.7.	Marketing.....	178
10.3.8.	Distribution.....	179
10.3.9.	External Evaluation .....	179
10.4.	Measures of Success .....	180
10.5.	Overview: Perceived Success Factors of TV Series and Success.....	180
11.	The Creators' Perception of Societal Relevance as Success Factor .....	182

11.1.	The Swiss Creators and Expert .....	182
11.1.1.	Elements of Societal Relevance .....	182
11.1.2.	Societal Relevance and Success.....	183
11.1.3.	Distinctions along Subsamples .....	184
11.1.4.	Overview.....	184
11.2.	The Scandinavian Creators.....	185
11.2.1.	Elements of Societal Relevance .....	185
11.2.2.	Societal Relevance and Success.....	187
11.2.3.	Distinctions along Subsamples .....	188
11.2.4.	Overview .....	190
11.3.	The Quebec Creator.....	190
11.3.1.	Societal Relevance and Success.....	190
11.3.2.	Overview .....	191
11.4.	The UK Creators and Experts .....	191
11.4.1.	Elements of Societal Relevance .....	191
11.4.2.	Societal Relevance and Success.....	192
11.4.3.	Distinctions along Subsamples .....	193
11.4.4.	Overview .....	194
11.5.	The German Creators .....	194
11.5.1.	Societal Relevance: Elements and Success .....	194
11.5.2.	Overview .....	195
11.6.	The Italian Creators .....	196
11.6.1.	Societal Relevance: Elements and Success .....	196
11.6.2.	Distinctions along Subsamples .....	197
11.6.3.	Overview .....	198
11.7.	The Dutch and Belgian Creators.....	199
11.7.1.	Societal Relevance: Elements and Success .....	199
11.7.2.	Distinctions along Subsamples .....	200
11.7.3.	Overview .....	201
12.	Ideal Types of Creators .....	202
12.1.	Ideal Type of “The Audience Servant” .....	203
12.1.1.	Influence of Audience Features .....	203
12.1.2.	Audience as the Essential Criterion .....	204

12.1.3. Audience Targeting .....	204
12.1.4. Audience Resonance, Success, Feedback .....	205
12.1.5. Task of Broadcasters.....	206
12.1.6. Prominence of “The Audience Servant” .....	206
12.1.7. Overview.....	207
12.2. Ideal Type of “The Crafter” .....	208
12.2.1. Attitude, Motivation, Inspiration .....	208
12.2.2. Content as Main Task.....	209
12.2.3. Processes .....	210
12.2.4. Role of Broadcasters .....	210
12.2.5. Perception of Audiences .....	211
12.2.6. Success .....	211
12.2.7. Prominence of “The Crafter” .....	212
12.2.8. Overview.....	213
12.3. Ideal Type of “The Salesperson” .....	213
12.3.1. Quantitative Success.....	213
12.3.2. The Salesperson at Broadcasters.....	214
12.3.3. Genre and Ratings .....	215
12.3.4. Budgetary Considerations.....	216
12.3.5. Marketing, Stars .....	216
12.3.6. Prominence of “The Salesperson” .....	217
12.3.7. Overview.....	218
12.4. Ideal Type of “The Messenger” .....	219
12.4.1. Nature of Messages .....	219
12.4.2. Importance of Messages .....	221
12.4.3. The Messenger and Success .....	222
12.4.4. Prominence of “The Messenger” .....	223
12.4.5. Overview.....	223
12.5. Ideal Type of “The Paymaster Servant” .....	224
12.5.1. Perceived Character of Broadcasters .....	224
12.5.2. Match of Content to Broadcasters .....	225
12.5.3. Control by Broadcasters.....	226
12.5.4. Greenlighting by Broadcasters .....	227

12.5.5. Success to Broadcasters.....	228
12.5.6. Prominence of “The Paymaster Servant” .....	228
12.5.7. Overview.....	229
12.6. Ideal Type of “The Artist” .....	230
12.6.1. Content Equals Expression Equals Art.....	230
12.6.2. Autonomy, Integrity and Artistic Value .....	231
12.6.3. Attitude toward Audience .....	233
12.6.4. Attitude toward Broadcasters.....	233
12.6.5. Prominence of “The Artist” .....	234
12.6.6. Overview.....	235
IV Conclusion .....	236
13. Summary and Discussion .....	236
13.1. Influences on Content of TV Series .....	236
13.2. Success Factors of TV Series.....	245
13.3. Societal Relevance as Success Factor of TV Series .....	246
13.4. The Creators’ Perception of Societal Relevance as Success Factor .....	249
13.5. Ideal Types of Creators .....	255
14. Conclusions .....	268
14.1. Varying Interpretations of Societal Relevance and Success .....	268
14.2. Societal Relevance: Conditional Success Factor of TV Series.....	269
14.3. Societal Relevance: Ingredient of Paths to Success .....	270
14.4. Decisive Influences on TV Series.....	272
14.5. Exceptions to Hierarchy of Influences.....	273
14.6. TV Series as People Business .....	274
14.7. Invalid Bases for Decision-Making and Constraints .....	274
14.8. Probable Causes for Surge of TV Series .....	275
14.9. Limitations and Further Research.....	276
14.10. Epilogue .....	279
Bibliography .....	XV
Appendices .....	XXXIV
1. Semi-structured Questionnaire .....	XXXIV
2. Codebook.....	XXXVIII
3. Reliability Test .....	L

4. Qualitative Comparative Analysis..... LI

    a. Raw Data..... LII

    b. Calibration.....LIII

    c. Analysis of Necessity ..... LIV

    d. Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis .....LV

    e. Sufficiency Solution..... LVI

## Table of Figures

Figure 1. “The Hierarchy of Influences Model” of Shoemaker and Reese (2014).....	32
Figure 2. The social system level influences on TV series’ content.....	35
Figure 3. The social institution level influences on TV series’ content.....	47
Figure 4. The organization level influences on TV series’ content.....	58
Figure 5. The routines level influences on TV series’ content.....	63
Figure 6. The individual level influences on TV series’ content.....	66
Figure 7. Step models of inductive category development and deductive category application.....	116
Figure 8. Prominence of levels of influences on content of TV series.....	121
Figure 9. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling influences on creation in number of words in statements.....	122
Figure 10. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling social system level influences on creation in number of words in statements .....	127
Figure 11. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling social institution level influences on creation in number of words in statements .....	134
Figure 12. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling organization level influences on creation in number of words in statements .....	152
Figure 13. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling routines level influences on creation in number of words in statements .....	162
Figure 14. Perceived influence in decision-making by roles/functions in number of words in statements .....	173
Figure 15. Prominence of success factors of meta-category content in number of words.....	174
Figure 16. Prominence of meta-categories of success factors in number of words ...	175
Figure 17. Prominence of success factors of meta-category organization aspects in number of words .....	177
Figure 18. Prominence of ideal types in shares of total number of words.....	203
Figure 19. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of ‘The Audience Servant’ in shares of total number of words .....	207
Figure 20. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of ‘The Crafter’ in shares of total number of words .....	212
Figure 21. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of ‘The Salesperson’ in shares of total number of words .....	218
Figure 22. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of ‘The Messenger’ in shares of total number of words .....	223
Figure 23. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of ‘The Paymaster Servant’ in shares of total number of words .....	229
Figure 24. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of ‘The Artist’ in shares of total number of words .....	235
Figure 25. Overview of perceived influences on content of TV series .....	245
Figure 26. Prominence of categories of societal relevance in number of words .....	249
Figure 27. Prominence of main segregators and various controversial topics in number of words .....	251

Figure 28. Societally relevant elements of TV series and their contribution to success .....	255
Figure 29. Prominence of ideal types in shares of total number of words: business model of the broadcaster of the TV series.....	263
Figure 30. Prominence of ideal types in shares of total number of words: role/function of respondent .....	264
Figure 31. Prominence of ideal types in shares of total number of words in statements assigned to the six types: country of production/domicile of respondent.....	267

## List of Tables

Table 1. Changes in television funding systems in selected countries .....	44
Table 2. Sample .....	111
Table 3. Category systems, procedural approaches and analyses .....	117
Table 4. Comparison of types: creators of TV series vs. professional communicators, journalists, film producers, entertainment workers.....	261
Table 5. Comparison of research design elements .....	LII
Table 6. Meta-categories of success in index values.....	LIII
Table 7. Calibration .....	LIV
Table 8. Analysis of necessity .....	LIV
Table 9. Truth table .....	LV
Table 10. Sufficiency solution model.....	LVI

# 1. Introduction and Research Questions

In this opening chapter, I introduce the study at hand (1.1) and offer a study overview (1.2). The research questions are introduced in the subchapter 1.23. In chapter 1.4 definitions, interpretations and demarcations of the main concepts deployed in the present study are briefly introduced.

## 1.1. Introduction

Media disseminate important messages not only in information formats. The dissemination of societally relevant messages also takes place in far less frequently investigated entertainment formats such as fictional TV series. A few years ago, when I watched *The Wire*, I enjoyed the ‘usual’ lures of serial crime drama like good plots, suspense and thrills, credible acting performances and exciting settings. However, to me, an important additional attraction of *The Wire* was the strongly opinionated analysis of social and political problems in the city of Baltimore (and, by extension, in the USA). The critical investigation in the TV series extends far beyond what I find in information media to this day. This particular quality of *The Wire* enticed an enduring interest on my part in fictional TV series. It also inspired the present study in which I try to find out, to put it simply, whether I can look forward to new TV series like *The Wire*.

TV series are an important object of study. The product attracts substantial numbers of viewers and constitutes varying, yet large, shares of the program of many content suppliers, and of the audiences’ media consumption. The significance of TV series as a research object is thus based on the format’s importance for content suppliers and audiences alike, but also on its multi-channel/platform distribution, its adaptability for other media. In the light of the multitude of distribution platforms, the term ‘TV’ can be seen as outdated. However, the findings of this study are not impacted by the consumption of the products on different platforms, so I continue to deploy the term ‘TV series,’ which is to be understood as audio-visual (video) entertainment in the shape of multi-episodic scripted fictional narratives, a definition loosely based on Hastall, Sukalla, and Bilandzic (2014).

TV series are often said to replace cinema as the most prestigious audio-visual fictional media product. The format apparently attracts an audience turned away from cinema contents by satisfying different interests, tastes, demands, and catering to changed consumption patterns. More important to this study, TV series by nature allow ample narrative space for the communication of ideas, for the inclusion in a variety of ways of specific (un-)intentional messages (Nesselhauf & Schleich, 2014a). Kallas (2014) singles out this long narrative form as the main reason for the (temporary) migration from film to TV series by reputable filmmakers (e.g., Spielberg, Soderberg, Scorsese, Allen, Lynch). Several series depict the morals and business of politics, others consist (also) of manifold comments on political and social problems of the society the story is set in. Hudelet (2018, p. 79) states about *The Wire*: “The



series (...) manifests the belief on the part of its creators that televised fiction now allows more freedom, more accuracy and greater impact than modern forms of journalism.” Certain developments<sup>1</sup> in the information media (can) encumber the dissemination of sophisticated societally relevant information, of ‘intelligent’ social commentaries, background stories, insights, and criticism of societal phenomena. It can be argued that this kind of content is finding, in another form, an increasingly comfortable home in TV series.

Murray (2013) praises the 70s US-American TV series *M.A.S.H.* as groundbreaking socially relevant comedy, in which the past Korean war stands for the, at the time ongoing, Vietnam war. The author designates the series as the frontrunner of a 70s trend towards ‘relevant’ series in US TV fiction. At the turn of the century, TV series like *Sex and the City* and *The Sopranos* were not only successful, but also highly praised by critics, on occasion also for the inclusion of strong doses of social commentary and highly accurate depictions of the Zeitgeist. The same is true for later series like *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Wire*. Sepinwall (2012, p. 80) says about the latter series: “It is a despairing sociological screed in cop-show drag: there were always cops and criminals, but the series used them to make various points about the (...) the broken condition of America itself”.

Martin (2014, p. 135) states that *The Wire*’s creators David Simon and Ed Burns confessed to the series’ broadcaster and financier HBO that the series was a Trojan horse, a piece of social activism dressed up as a crime series to lure the audience. This social activism was, in the eyes of the showrunner (i.e. head writer and executive producer combined in one function/position) of one of the most system-critical series, thus not a success factor in terms of audience resonance. The topic of this study is societal relevance as success factor of TV series. It investigates the creators’ perception of what societal relevance as a content element of TV series consists of, and in how far they perceive these elements as a factor in the success of TV series.

Investigation of the perceptions of certain content and messages in TV series and their contribution to success of the product leads inevitably to (logically preceding) questions pertaining to the decision-making about the content of the products. If the content of TV series is of interest, the decision-making process needs to be investigated more closely. Redvall (2013, p. 183) finds, pertaining to the Danish TV series *The Killing* and *Borgen* that the series’ success is not just the result of the talent of the creators but is also due to the managerial ideas at the fiction department of the broadcaster and to the changes in the “domain” of television drama.

Trade and popular press question regularly how TV series came about. The development from an idea, an outline, to a cost-intensive product seems of interest. *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, and *Mad Men* were on the brink of not being made at all. Also, the series were repeatedly threatened with cancellation by the broadcasters. Around the inception of the series *House of Cards* different discourses resonate in the media. The idea is ascribed to a former lobbyist yet is at the same time attributed to Netflix

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<sup>1</sup> Monopolization, economization, changes in news production technology and rhythms, mainstreaming of subjects, prevalence of current news and topical content, etc.

greenlighting a remake of an older UK series (with the same title) based on consumer data analysis. It thus seems warranted to first investigate the creators' perception of which factors influences the content of their TV series and try to establish which influences are (or were) decisive in the decision-making process in the opinion of the creators.

The decision-making process on TV series (and other media products) is governed by insecurity on the in- and output borders (Hirsch, 1972), and is not transparent. The composition of content is arguably influenced by many factors. It follows that the inclusion of specific messages, also those regarded as societally relevant, is determined by numerous influences. Redvall (2013, pp. 9–10) formulates the target of the investigation of influences on content: the focus is on “enabling as well as constraining conditions for creative work”. Without any constraints it would be entirely up to the individual creators (in their production teams) to integrate messages in their TV series at will.

## **1.2. Study Overview**

The present study investigates content elements that are regarded as societally relevant by creators of TV series and the influences they perceive as constraining or enabling the creation of series and the inclusion of ‘societally relevant’ content elements. One reason for integrating such elements might be the perception of creators and decision-makers that societal relevance contributes to success of TV series. To put the findings on the perception of societal relevance as success factor in perspective, I also investigate other success factors of TV series. I distill ideal types of creators as a tool to inform further and to approximate, as a pre-amble to the conclusions, the answers to the research questions.

The study begins with a literature review (chapters 2 to 7), in which also the current state of topical research is discussed. At the end of every chapter of the literature review I offer an overview in bullet points and I outline the research gap pertaining to the discussed topical field as well as the goals I hope to achieve with the ensuing empirical research.

In chapter 8, I introduce the method and sample of the present study: the research design, the data collection method of in-depth expert/elite interviews based on a semi-structured questionnaire, the sample of interview partners, the deployed qualitative content analysis, and the development and application of category systems. In addition, the analyses of salience and distillation of ideal types are elucidated. The chapter ends with a discussion of reliability and validity of the study, the data and the method.

The results of the analysis are presented in the chapters 9 to 12. In chapter 9, the results pertaining to the perceived influences on the content of TV series, the constraining and enabling conditions for creation and mediation as perceived by the interviewed creators of TV series are outlined. In chapter 10, I present the creators' perception of success itself and success factors of TV series. I discuss the salience of

the success factors, the perception of content as a success factor and the perception of the additional success factors besides societal relevance. The latter, then, is discussed in chapter 11. In the chapter an analysis is presented of what the respondents perceive as societal relevance in TV series, and the extent to which the inclusion of these elements constitutes a success factor for the product TV series in the creators' opinion. To inform further on the tendencies in the data, ideal types of creators that are relevant to the central questions of the study are discussed in chapter 12.

Finally, in the last two chapters 13 and 14 of the study, I summarize the findings, compare them across subsamples and to the literature, formulate the conclusions, outline the limitations and suggest further research.

### 1.3. Research Questions

Insecurity governs the decisions in TV series production, and a lack of clarity surrounds the decision-making processes on content and messages of TV series. The content of TV series is an outcome of the interplay of numerous influences. The influences can enable and/or constrain creative work, expression and integration of messages, including those that creators regard as societally relevant.

Therefore, I answer the following research question:

- *RQ 1A: Which constraining and/or enabling influences do creators of TV series perceive on creative work and mediation of messages?*

An investigation of the comparative strength of the constraining and enabling conditions as perceived by creators substantiates findings further. Thus, I arrive at the following, related research question:

- *RQ 1B: How do the perceived constraining and/or enabling influences compare for extent of impact on creative work and mediation of messages?*

The creators of *The Wire* found it necessary to conceal specific content elements, or messages, in their series from the broadcaster. The attention goes then out to what constitutes societally relevant content to creators:

- *RQ 2: What does societally relevant content entail in the perception of creators of TV series?*

In disguising their societally relevant content as a crime story, a genre that supposedly has a large audience appeal, the creators of *The Wire* indicate that societal relevance per se might not be a success factor in terms of audience resonance.

It follows that I arrive at the following research question:

- *RQ 3: In how far is societal relevance perceived by creators as a success factor of TV series?*

To investigate the contribution to success of societal relevance further, I expand the investigation with trans-medial generic success factors discerned in previous

studies that I (co-) authored. By deploying qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) I substantiate the findings on societal relevance as success factor.

The explorative, qualitative nature and volume of the gathered information evoke a topical summary, the provision of additional insights and an intermediate approximation of the results. Thus, after the data analysis and before formulating conclusions, I draft a typology and discern ideal types of creators of TV series based on extrapolating relevant tendencies in the data.

## **1.4. Definitions, Interpretations and Demarcations**

Before presenting the relevant works on the topic of study, I briefly discuss definitions, interpretations of concepts and delineate the subject.

### **1.4.1. Media: Institution, Systems, Types, Sectors**

The institution media refers to the whole of media organizations, activities, and modes of operandi, that comply to “requirements set by the society” (McQuail, 2010, p. 59). The defining features of mass media institutions are the production and distribution of content by communicators in response to demand; the attainment and exercising of functions and responsibilities in the public sphere; the self-regulation within societally defined boundaries; the uncertainty of membership of the institution; the principle of freedom of media institutions and their independence of political and economic power. Producing and distributing organizations in the TV series market, as well as the interviewed practitioners, are actors in the institution called ‘media’.

According to McQuail (2010, p. 220) a ‘media system’ entails the (mass) media in a nation and can be internally “linked by a shared political-economic logic”. In the sampled countries of the study, mixed systems with private and public media are established (McQuail, 2010, p. 221).

Media types are often distinguished along the basic carrier technologies (film, print, radio, TV, online), but this criterion is increasingly obsolete due to digitalization and convergence (cf. von Rimscha & Siegert, 2015, pp. 43–45). The subgroups of media types are ‘media sectors.’ So, for example, does the media type ‘print’ consist of the sectors newspapers, books, and magazines. McQuail (2010, p. 221) also finds the distinctions problematic: ‘film’, ‘TV’ and other media types and formats entail diverging dissemination technologies, organizations, and business models. On the consumer market, one can distinguish by seriality: one-off, multi-episodic and continuous products (cf. Sommer, von Rimscha, Verhoeven, Krebs, & Siegert, 2016). Most TV series are of multi-episodic nature, but some run for years and approach the seriality category of continuous products.

### **1.4.2. Levels of Analysis**

The following levels of analysis of the structure of the media institution are listed by McQuail (2010, p. 221): international media; media system (all national

media); multimedia enterprise (with stakes in various media types); media type and/or sector (books, TV, radio, etc.); distribution area (nation, region, city, community); unit or channel of medium (TV or radio station, newspaper); particular genre or format (reality TV, radio news programs, boulevard press, martial arts films, local news sites, etc.); a particular media product (novel X, TV show Y, film Z). In addition, the internet portal is a gateway exercising access control to a “larger territory” (McQuail, 2010, p. 221).

This study focuses on the format of TV series and creators of particular products. The companies which the interviewees supply with their products consist of international media like Sky, Netflix or multimedia companies like public service broadcasters (abbreviation: PSB), and advertising-based (abbreviation: ad-based) broadcasters. The creators of TV series work within the national media system in a broadly defined TV or video sector. Most of the creators’ series are distributed nationally, many also internationally.

### **1.4.3. Media Content, Texts, Creators**

Media content is defined as “the complete range of visual and verbal information carried in what were once called the mass media and increasingly by smaller more interactive and targeted channels” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, pp. 2–3).

“Texts,” to Hesmondhalgh (2012, pp. 3, 420), is the preferred term for the content, such as TV series, produced by the cultural industries. The cultural industries make and distribute texts, and these texts “have an influence on our understanding and knowledge of the world” (Hesmondhalg, 2013, p. 4). The influence is not limited to information: “films, TV series, comics, music, video games (...) provide us with recurring representations of the world and so act as a kind of reporting” (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 4).

In this study, I follow Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 6) and deploy the term ‘symbol creators’ (or short: ‘creators’) when referring to the individuals exercising the different functions (writers, producers, developers, on occasion others) essential to the conception, development and production (‘creation’) of content of TV series. Symbolic creativity is investigated from the perspective of the intertwining of culture, society and commerce, in researching how creators’ work is “funded, supported or suppressed” (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 7). Or, in other words, how creative work is enabled or constrained (Redvall, 2013, pp. 9-10). In the creation (of TV series), failure is more common than success, and the pressure to produce “certain kinds of texts rather than others” surges (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 8). Inventive and idiosyncratic symbolic creativity is permanently in demand, and a higher level of autonomy is granted to symbolic creators in the cultural industries than to comparable workers in other industries. On the other hand, a key problem for the cultural industries is finding a paying audience for a created text, and the control over circulation of texts by cultural industries is high.

#### **1.4.4. TV Series, Narratives**

TV series are in this study understood as video entertainment in the shape of multi-episodic fictional narratives. Following Hastall et al. (2014), narratives are medial representations of events, that are meaningfully connected in a sequential order, and that allow recipients insights in the world, feelings and motives of the acting characters. For Mittell (2015) narratives consist of the elements story world, characters, events, and temporality. Schlütz (2016, pp. 13, 29) defines TV series as multi-episodic sequences of distinct but connected (TV) films. The connecting of the episodes into a continuous narrative is established on a formal level (supply/broadcasting rhythm, opening credits, title music), on a content level (characters, actions, settings), and on a structural level (composition of storyline and plots).

#### **1.4.5. TV Production and Broadcasting as Cultural Industry**

According to Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 16), cultural industries are “institutions (mainly profit-making companies, but also state organizations and non-profit organizations) that are most directly involved in the production of social meaning.” The core cultural industries have a large audience reach, practice industrial ways of reproduction, and are according to Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 17): a) broadcasting: the radio and TV industries “including (...) cable, satellite and digital forms,” b) film industries, c) music industries, d) print and electronic publishing, e) digital games, e) advertising, marketing, public relations, and f) web design. Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 18) acknowledges that the definition of cultural industries and the distinction criteria are at times problematic. Google, Apple, Microsoft and Amazon are tremendously important for the dissemination of media products, but their core businesses are not (yet) those of the cultural industries. Streaming services like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime can be viewed as cultural industries and the same is true for content providers on YouTube.

The TV industry, writes Hesmondhalg in 2012 (p. 348), is the most “significant cultural industry, in terms of time spent and revenue earned.” In the light of convergence of media industries, it would be correct to refer to the specific industry investigated in this study as the ‘serial audio-visual fiction sector’ that consists of many organizations deploying various carrier technologies, business models and development, production and distribution strategies.

#### **1.4.6. TV Series as Popular Culture**

‘Mass culture’ is the content associated with ‘mass communication.’ McQuail (2010, p. 62) names as key attributes of the concept of mass culture, that it is tainted with a derogatory image: distance to folk, traditional and elite (‘high,’ ‘high-brow,’ ‘real’) culture; mass produced, standardized, commercial contents geared towards a mass audience. McQuail (2010, pp. 60–61) sees the term as dated and over time replaced with the more accurate term ‘popular culture,’ that “simply denotes what many (...) people like” (McQuail, 2010, p. 61). The respondents in this research

project, the creators of TV series, may aim to produce popular culture (commercial/audience success), whereby the ambition to be perceived as producing 'higher' forms of culture, in other words 'art' (or 'high-end TV', or 'Quality TV') by audiences, critics and peers, might surface as well.

#### **1.4.7. Societal Relevance**

Societal relevance is a multi-faceted concept. In this study, it is interpreted as a (possible) content element of TV series. The working definition of societal relevance draws on work of Shoemaker and Reese (2014), Creeber (2007), and Eilders and Nitsch (2015b). TV series can, in a variety of ways, mediate messages pertaining to the main social segregators: class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. Politics are inherently societally relevant, and realism is often regarded as such as well. In addition to these, controversial (i.e. positional) topics like nationalism and national identity, environment, education, health care, housing and employment issues, physical and psychological issues, as well as mounting inequality, social stratification and disorganization, violence, crime, justice, drugs, terrorism, dystopia and war are further topics that are societally relevant. In the data of the study, the respondents determine what (any) societally relevant content in (their) TV series entails.

Questions of (the extent of) bias in depictions are potentially an important facet of the research topic of this study. McQuail (2010, p. 358) formulates generalizations that are distilled from studies on news content but are, the author states, also present in drama and fiction: an overrepresentation of men and social, political and cultural elites; an emphasis on status quo-confirming social values; a nationalistic and ethnocentric bias in selection of topics; a more favorable treatment of business elites and employers than of workers and trade unions; a marginalization of ethnic minorities, immigrant groups, the poor and the unemployed; sanitization of war. Congruently, in the literature review of this study, I present (among others) studies that investigate societally relevant and biased depictions of social groups and phenomena in TV series.

The suitable method to investigate distortion in portrayals in a TV series is an analysis of the content. As McQuail states (2010, p. 360), the content is available and is non-reactive to the researcher. It is, however, less valid to ask creators of content to indicate to what extent the incorporated societally relevant elements are biased. Messages are, in the eyes of the communicator, perhaps of a subjective nature but not conspicuously skewed. Very few creators could or would acknowledge committing willful distortion. Most people regard their voiced opinion predominantly as reasonable, truthful and moderate. Interviews are thus not an adequate data gathering method to investigate the extent and direction of bias in depictions in TV series.

# **I Literature Review**

## **2. Introduction to the Literature Review**

The body of work on (the content of) TV series can – of late – be labeled as substantial, but is not comparable to, for example, the volume of research on journalism and informational contents. Over the last decades, the literature has strongly increased, possibly as a reaction to the perceived surge of TV series. TV series are perceived as a media product of significance, a successful media format in insecure times for the media business, a sophisticated form of expression and even art, a prestige object for suppliers and cultural capital for consumers, and – last but not least – as a carrier of specific content and messages. Nevertheless, a research gap pertaining to the investigation of (mediation in) TV series from a communication science perspective remains.

The existing research on TV series is not an internally coherent, well-defined or -structured domain of communication studies. Such domains display more congruence of perspectives and research questions, and of scholarly disciplines, investigated theories and models, deployed methods, and empirical evidence. The smorgasbord of scientific traditions and backgrounds in the research topic of TV series, however, includes many works from the humanities, film and television science as well as literature studies. The present study approaches the topic from a communication science perspective and deploys its analysis methods. Some of the reviewed works share the wider communication or media science perspective and are embedded in cultural studies, media sociology, media economics and management, political economy, and media production studies. The realms of business administration and marketing are represented in studies as well. In the light of the wide and somewhat confusing variety, in the first part of the literature review I indicate to what extent the communication science theories, models, perspectives, and concepts introduced by McQuail (2010) are relevant to the discussed works, and I sketch in how far they contribute to the foundation of the present investigation.

In addition to McQuail, works by several other scholars contribute substantially to this study. The media sociologists Shoemaker and Reese (2014) investigate mediation, whereby influences on media contents attain importance. The scholars present a conceptual model that can be deployed to organize and structure empirically evidenced influences on media content. In this study, said model and its categorization of factors serve as the framework for the dissection of (perceived) influences on TV series found in the literature and the data. Another author whose work contributes greatly to the present study is Hesmondhalgh (2012, 2018). He investigates the changes in the cultural industries in the last decades from a perspective of political economy and media production analysis. The author provides this study with important insights on media industries, actors and contents, on the workings and position of public service broadcasters in Western Europe, on the depiction of class in media content, and on class divisions in media production.



Lotz (2014), on the other hand, analyzes the development of the US-American TV landscape and business and her findings inform the description of the US TV industry. Based on her work, some of the main tendencies are formulated and are then contrasted to findings pertaining to European TV series production. Schlütz's (2016) investigation of 'Quality TV' draws on a perspective from communication science and media economics. Some of the author's definitions, descriptions of facets and dimensions of TV series, and her findings on 'Quality TV' inform the present study at imperative moments in the argumentation. Another author this study largely draws on is Redvall (2013) who investigates the production of TV series at the Danish public service broadcaster (Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Dansk Radio, abbreviated in the following as 'DR'). She (2013, p. 7) focuses on the processes – in addition to the people and the products (as film and television research traditionally does) – in case studies of the production structure. She interviewed creators of past and current TV series and observed the creative decision-making process of one episode of a series.

In the light of the research gap pertaining to (mediation in) the entertainment format TV series, it is important to add another source of information besides scientific research: journalistic trade press investigation. McQuail (2010, p. 14) lists operational theory as one of the theories relevant to (mass) communication. The presented journalistic research on the production of TV series is assignable to operational theory. The authors investigate the practices of creation of TV series in interviews and portraits, whilst upholding the highest journalistic standards. Among these trade press sources, works by Kallas (2014), Martin (2014), and Sepinwall (2012) feature most prominently. Naturally, journalists select and treat their topics and sources in ways they (or their editors and publishers) see fit, which might create a bias in the findings. However, the investigative aims of these journalists/authors diverge far from, and do thus not interfere with, the research objects of the study at hand. The bias towards reputable, critically acclaimed, famous and/or successful creators is of no consequence either: all creators were unsuccessful at certain points in their careers and inform from this perspective as well. It follows that a – for the foundation and the results of this study – relevant distortion in the trade press information is not detectable.

The US-American influence in the global media (and TV series) landscape remains undisputedly large (Hesmondhalgh, 2012). Correspondingly, the reviewed literature stems mostly from US-American authors and to some extent from their European colleagues. The main trade press publications are from the US as well.

The research topic of this study, societal relevance as element of TV series' content, requires from the researcher some level of familiarity with the nature and salience of social, cultural and political issues in the homeland of creators and the countries that the TV series are produced in. The selection of literature is confined to North America and Western Europe. The sample of the empirical part consists of various European countries and one respondent works in Quebec, Canada. Although this study is of explorative, qualitative nature and does not lay any claims of representativeness, it is relevant to investigate the production of TV series in

different (Western European) countries because the output of TV series in number, quality, genre, tonality, etc. varies strongly per country.

The literature review begins with an exploration of the different main topics of study: discussed in chapter 3 are the localization of theories and models in communication science. The institution media, media organizations and workers, and the cultural industry TV are elucidated. Then, in chapter 4, the relevance of the research object is discussed, and studies on mediation of messages in TV series and audience effects are presented. In chapter 5, studies on the influences on content of TV series are assigned to five conceptual levels of constraining and enabling factors. The five levels range from the macro to the micro levels of analysis of the influences on media (TV series) content and are: social system level influences; social institution level influences; organization level influences; routines level influences; and individual level influences. In chapter 6 of the literature review, I elaborate upon the concept of societal relevance and introduce studies that investigate the mediation of societally relevant messages in TV series. In addition, I present several studies exploring the contribution of societally relevant topic to TV series' success. In chapter 7, generic trans-medial success factors are briefly discussed based on work of Sommer et al. (2016) and Verhoeven, von Rimscha, Krebs, Siegert, and Sommer (2017) and I tentatively sketch the factors' applicability for TV series.

### **3. Communication Science Framework**

In this chapter, the study of media and communication, as well the relevant theories, models and perspectives are briefly introduced. Attention is also drawn to works that elucidate the relation between media and society, to the 'institution media', to the 'cultural industry' television, to media organizations and to (typologies of) media workers.

#### **3.1. Approaches to Study of Media and Communication**

The topic of the study at hand, societal relevance as success factors of TV series, is discussed from the perspective of the study of media and (mass/public) communication. The term communication science is commonly deployed for the field of study.

"Under the name 'communication science', the field has been defined by Berger and Chaffee (1987) as a science which 'seeks to understand the production, processing and effects of symbol and signal systems by developing testable theories, containing lawful generalizations, that explain phenomena associated with production, processing and effects.'"  
(McQuail, 2010, p. 15)

In line with this definition, the explorative qualitative enquiry presented in this study consists of a systematic investigation that aims to render verifiable results. McQuail (2010, p. 15) finds Berger and Chaffee's model of enquiry not (entirely) equipped to analyze the processes of giving and taking meaning in varying contexts. McQuail (2010, pp. 19–20) lists alternatives to the 'communication science' approach: the structural, cultural and behavioral approaches. The first two are relevant to this study.

The structural approach primarily investigates media systems and organizations in relation to society, whereby media content is viewed as influenced by social, systemic and organizational structures (McQuail, 2010, p. 19). The conceptual model of influences on media content by Shoemaker and Reese (2014) that is prominently featured in this study, builds to an extent on the structural approach. In terms of media use and effects, the approach focuses on consequences of mass communication for social institutions (and groups). This premise provides the primary motivation for the investigation of (decision-making on) the content of TV series; why would one investigate any media content if it has no effects on recipients? In this study, effects are presupposed but not investigated.

The cultural approach is mainly deployed in the investigation of meaning, social contexts and cultural experiences (McQuail, 2010, p. 19). A fair share of the reviewed literature adheres to an extent to the cultural approach. This is because the research questions and the investigated topics of this study are of relevance to the cultural approach. The commonly deployed methods of the cultural approach – qualitative in-depth investigation and analysis of particular contents, texts, and social and human practices – are practiced in the study at hand: the creation and

production of TV series are investigated in detail by content analysis of in-depth interviews with practitioners. McQuail (2010, p. 20) states that the cultural approach can evoke important insights for media planners and producers, which underlines the societal, business-economic and scientific relevance of the study at hand.

### **3.2. Relevant Theory, Models, Perspectives**

McQuail (2010) distinguishes between media theories, structures, organizations, content, audiences and effects. The author (2010, p. 5) defines theory as a “general proposition, itself based on observation and logical argument that states the relationship between observed phenomena and seeks either to explain or to predict the relation.” Theories serve to make sense of observed realities and guide the processing and evaluation of data.

McQuail (2010, pp. 13–15) discusses five kinds of theory relevant to mass communication. The first, social scientific kind of theory, is originally derived from various disciplines like sociology, psychology and politics, and aims to formulate verifiable and testable statements about the nature, workings and effects of media based on systematic observation of media and relevant sources. Pertaining to the investigation of (the production of) scripted fictional TV series, social scientific theory and its research practices are somewhat sparsely applied. This study and some of the reviewed works, however, are assignable to social scientific theory and research. More often applied to the investigation of TV, film, literature, graphic arts, etc. is cultural theory, which aims to apply some quality criteria to cultural products. Although based on consistent argumentation, the core basis of cultural theory is often “ideational” (McQuail, 2010, pp. 13-14). Many of the works reviewed in this study are grounded in cultural theory and it also embeds (some of) the here investigated issues. The trade press contributions reviewed in this study show an overlap with cultural theory in its basic premises and questions. Several works adhere to normative theories and deliberate how media ought to function from a societal or individual perspective. Operational theory explicitly evokes a large share of the reviewed scientific studies and implicitly guides the trade press works. In these theories, the focus is on the conduct of media practitioners (McQuail, 2010, p. 14). The data of the study at hand are gathered in interviews with creators of TV series, and operational-theory works provide a basis for the investigated research topics. Redvall (2013, p. 23) interprets production as problem finding and problem solving, in accordance with work of Carrol and Bordwell (2009). McQuail (2010, p. 14) cites Katz (1977) and formulates the relevance of the study at hand by stating that researchers can see regularities and patterns in media production of which the practitioners are not aware. In addition to differentiating between five theories, McQuail (2010, pp. 70–75) also distinguishes four models of communication. All have a degree of relevance for this study, albeit pertaining to different questions and investigated issues.

The transmission model is the oldest model. McQuail (2010, p. 70) singles out the revision of the transmission model by Westley and McClean from 1957 as most significant. Their revised model recognizes that communicators do not usually originate messages and emphasizes the selection of information for transmission. The model is thus one foundation of the body of theory on gatekeeping, to which the conceptual model of Shoemaker and Reese (2014) belongs. The present study focuses on the processes and decision-making in the creation and production of fictional TV series and on the inclusion of specific intentional messages. Messages are always based on, and selected from, human/social features and situations as perceived by communicators.

The expressive (or ritual) model perceives communication as a means of maintenance of society in time, and is found in art, religion, public events, to some extent in (strategic) communication campaigns, and in uses of social media. Communication is here linked to participation, and the model emphasizes the intrinsic satisfaction of sender and receiver. The model offers some insight for understanding the significance of cultural capital, and for the folk, traditional and ritual elements of storytelling, that are condensed into genres of TV series (cf. Schlütz, 2016, pp. 10–30).

The publicity model, states McQuail (2010, p. 72), emphasizes that the primary aim of media is often to attract (sustained) attention. The mere fact that attention is attracted is of more interest than its quality. To almost all media organizations, audience size is of crucial importance. Because of sales, consumer fees, advertising income, and/or fulfillment of mandates, in practice this model often attains prevalence. It follows, that the publicity model also provides the background for findings of reviewed works and this study.

McQuail (2010, p. 73) names the pronounced features of commercial media organizations. The organizations' competitiveness stems from attention being (regarded as) a zero-sum process. Attention-gaining is regarded as inherently value-neutral and not carrying meaning: form and technique are more important than actual content (McQuail, 2010, p. 73). Verhoeven et al. (2017) find the building block (meta-category of success factors) 'form/design' necessary for the success of media products in an online survey of 255 decision-makers in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, whilst content does not qualify as such.

The fourth model of communication is the reception model (McQuail, 2010, p. 73) which emphasizes, briefly summarized, the encoding and decoding of messages. Messages in media content are interpreted in line with the recipients' own features (McQuail, 2010, p. 73). However, intended meanings are "hard to resist" for receivers, states McQuail (2010, p. 73) following Stuart Hall. In this study, the focus lies on messages that are (intentionally) incorporated in the content of TV series by the creators. Furthermore, in Hall's model, the TV program offer is meaningful discourse encoded according to the meaning structure of the production organization, which is another subject of this study.

Media theory is characterized by divergent perspectives (McQuail, 2010, pp. 11–13): in addition to progressive versus conservative tendencies that are related to the

scholar's (or his/her sponsors') world view, critical and administrative orientations are distinguished. The former investigates problems surrounding media and relates these to social issues and questions of power. The discussion of influences on the content of TV series, as well as the discerning of the nature and significance of societally relevant elements is guided by the critical orientation. The administrative orientation aims to understand and solve practical public communication problems (McQuail, 2010, p. 11). In this study, these problems entail the composition of content and strife for success by creators of TV series.

### **3.3. The Main Media-Society Theories**

The topic of this study is societal relevance as a success factor of TV series. It follows, that theories about the relation of media and society embed this research as well as the reviewed works.

The main theories pertaining to the relation of media and society are: political economy; social constructionism; the mass society; functionalism; communication technology determinism; and the information society (McQuail, 2010, pp. 94–108).

Political economy influences authors like Shoemaker and Reese (2014), Lotz (2014) and Hesmondhalg (2012, 2018), who lay the most important groundwork and offer the central concepts, the structuring of information and frameworks of interpretation in this study. McQuail (2010, p. 95) states that the common denominator of critical political economy is Marxist-inspired media theory. The 20<sup>th</sup> century revisions (by Marcuse, Althusser, Gramsci and others) focus on ideas and ideology, on effects of media in the interest of the ruling groups, on legitimatization of the domination of capitalism, and on socialization and hegemony (McQuail, 2010, p. 96). Economic control and logic determine the media content, the media structure tends towards monopoly, and media ownership is globalizing. Contents and audiences are commodified, real diversity decreases and opposition voices are marginalized. The public interest in communication is subordinated to private interests (McQuail, 2010, p. 96).

Hesmondhalg (2012, 2018), Shoemaker and Reese (2014) and Lotz (2014) adhere to the notions that media are players in, and part of, an economic system, and are themselves governed by economic conditions that determine the media content to a larger extent. Hesmondhalg, Shoemaker and Reese also focus on media having close links to the political system, to economic, political, cultural subsystems and elites, whilst disseminating inherently socio-political content. Hesmondhalg emphasizes a lack of diversity regarding class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality in media production and content, and Shoemaker and Reese concentrate on skewed influences on media content and biased mediation. Lotz elucidates industrial and organizational facets that determine the TV production and contents. Hesmondhalg, Shoemaker and Reese pay attention to negative consequences like "reduction of independent media sources, concentration on largest markets, (...) reduced investment in less profitable media tasks (...), neglect of smaller and poorer sectors of the potential audience and

often a politically unbalanced range of news media” (McQuail, 2010, p. 96). Lotz investigates one medium (TV) in one country (USA), and examines the radically changed conditions for TV program that is a product of a profit-oriented industry. She finds positively interpreted outcomes like an increase in choice and quality of TV programs, diversification of the suppliers and offerings, and a power shift from producers towards audiences.

McQuail (2010, p. 97) sees the relevance of political-economic theory enhanced by trends in media business and technology: increasing concentration and convergence of ICT, telecommunication, entertainment and media (von Rimscha & Siegert, 2015, p. 49), the rise of a global information economy, a decline of the public sector in media and telecommunications, and a growing digital divide or information inequality.

Social constructionist theory influences various authors reviewed in this study, most prominently among these are Shoemaker and Reese (2014), who provide the study at hand with the central framework for the investigation of influences on TV series’ content. According to McQuail (2010, p. 101), the theory holds that media lay the basis for the construction of reality, that media selectively reproduce certain meanings and that media are not able to provide an objective account of social reality. In the sections of this literature review on portrayals of different groups in society, numerous works are introduced that adhere to these concepts.

The other main media-society theories (the mass society theory, functionalist theory, media technological determinism, and the information society theory) are less relevant to this study.

### **3.4. Media, Power, Society**

McQuail (2010, p. 7) distinguishes general themes in the discussion on origins, importance and effects of communication. The themes are related to time, place and power. Most relevant to the research questions of this study are the numerous issues connected to the latter: influences *on* media and influences *of* media (cf. Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). Media mediate information and ideas: which social realities do media institutions and their products portray? Which meaning do messages and contents of media carry? Do media cause effects in society or are media contents the outcome of social forces (McQuail, 2010, p. 8)? The main themes of discussion on media and society (McQuail, 2010, pp. 87–94) are all to a certain extent important to this study.

The work of many scholars reviewed here assumes that media (might) bring about social change (to some extent), which then renders the social reality that is mediated in TV series important. Other scholars see certain (portrayals in) TV series as a condensation of changes in society.

The theme of power and inequality relates the media to the political and economic power structures in society. Important questions concern the origins of media power, the control over media, the portrayal of social reality, the effectiveness

of media, the promotion of equality, the access to media, and the use of power by media. On questions of media and power, two opposing modes of perception have emerged: the models of dominant versus pluralist media. Pertaining to the research object of TV series, the pluralist model seems most valid: a diverse offer of products supplied by many different creators. However, many arguments posed by the dominant model of media and power are to an extent confirmed by scholars (see below): the exercise of power by few distributors and financiers, and the dissemination of a differentiated, but – pertaining to portrayals of groups and issues – structurally biased worldview. The potential of positive emancipating, pluralizing and democratizing effects of social media – of which the contents are without exception controlled by obsessively profit-oriented US tech giants – has not been fulfilled. Social media also bear hardly any relevance to the dissemination of TV series (thus far).

### **3.5. Features of the Institution Media**

Media are not just another business, writes McQuail (2010, p. 218). The nature of activities of the ‘institution media’ is economic, political and is strongly determined by rapidly evolving technologies. Media are businesses as well as social and cultural institutions (McQuail, 2010, p. 220). The produced goods and services (aim to) satisfy private needs but are also regarded as exercising functions in the public domain by disseminating content regarded as “collective property” (McQuail, 2010, p. 218). Use of the media goods and services does (in principle) not lessen their accessibility to further consumers. Von Rimscha and Siegert (2015, pp. 24–40) further distinguish the features that make media goods stand out as economic goods. Media goods are club or public goods, and media contents in themselves are not products, but services coagulated in the shape of a product (von Rimscha & Siegert, 2015, p. 29). The protection of intellectual property is deficient in media and the quality of products is not transparent. Media production is governed by insecurity, the first copy costs of media products are high and the fixed costs depression is large. In combination with a wide range of societal functions and a binary orientation on the audience as well as the advertising market, the aforementioned characteristics lead to (a degree of) market failure.

In the study at hand, substantial attention goes out to the basic business models of the broadcasters who commission the TV series of the sampled creators. McQuail (2010, pp. 222–226) outlines economic principles that govern these organizations. He (McQuail, 2010, p. 218) follows Picard’s definition from 1989: a market entails suppliers that provide the same, or easily interchangeable, goods or services to the same set of potential consumers. The consumer market for media products is distinguished from the advertising market, where the audience is the traded product. Many media types (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, internet) cater to both markets simultaneously. Other sources of revenue of media are sponsoring, product placement, public relations, subsidies, private, non-profit and direct audience



support (McQuail, 2010, p. 222). TV series are also financed by product placement, public money and, on occasion, contributions from non-profit trusts. The surge of online media has complicated the market definitions and tapped new revenue streams, but also challenges the economic basis of older media (McQuail, 2010, p. 222).

The distinction between the two main sources of income for media has consequences and facilitates the understanding of media features and trends. The independence and credibility of (strongly) advertising-reliant (information) media is often questioned. McQuail (2010, p. 226) does not doubt the existence of a bias at advertising-based media caused by “unwanted external influence on content.”

On the advertising market, costs of media products are recouped before production and the measurement of success is based on numbers and types of customers. Homogenous audiences are more cost-effective for the advertisers and this might evoke a decrease in media (content) diversity. McQuail (2010, p. 224) follows Tunstall’s findings from 1991 and finds that the (perceived) low quality of media products is the result of competition for a single revenue stream (mass consumer advertising). However, advertising is itself diversifying and, increasingly, a wide range of content is (or can be) supported (McQuail, 2010, p. 224).

On the consumer market, the costs are recouped after production: quality, satisfaction, and popularity carry significant weight. McQuail (2010, pp. 224-226) observes that diversity becomes lucrative where profitable niche markets are served. A trend towards premium pay sources is discerned, but media reliant on consumer revenue are very susceptible to finance shortages in down-turning markets (von Rimscha & Siegert, 2015, pp. 93–107).

### **3.6. Problems of ‘Cultural Industries’**

Hesmondhalg (2012, pp. 27–32) lists the typical problems of the cultural industries and the deployed solutions. The cultural industries partake in a highly risky business (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 27). Audience preferences are volatile, the quality of the product of largely autonomous creative work is unclear, and the positive media resonance of products, that is often regarded as required for success, cannot be (entirely) controlled. The many misses are “offset against hits by building a repertoire” (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 26) by the more sizable companies, but profits vary strongly across enterprises and periods. The attempted solutions entail enlarging the cultural companies and repertoires (horizontal and vertical concentration), internationalization, multisector and -media integration, and co-opting publicity. Another risk-reducing strategy is formatting, the linking of texts to specific and/or established serials, genres and ‘stars.’ The addition of advertising as another revenue stream can also be viewed as a risk-reducing strategy, but many observers see attention for advertising as the actual product of commercial media companies (Napoli, 2009). The dialectic of creativity versus commerce facilitates the relative freedom of symbol creators but also contributes to the difficult environment

of cultural businesses (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 29). The outsourcing of creative work to 'independents' for a fee is a common risk-reducing strategy. Cultural commodities have high fixed (first-copy) costs and low variable (additional copies') costs. Audience maximization and focusing on bestsellers then becomes a dominating strategy because a high turnover of a product generates even more profit than it does in other sectors. To retain the value of products, the cultural industries create (artificial) scarcity: vertical integration facilitates control over distribution of a product. Copyrights and limited access to reproduction inhibit the free copying of texts (cf. von Rimscha & Siegert, 2015).

Hesmondhalg (2012) offers an overview of the important developments in the cultural industries since the 1980s. Large conglomerations dominate the cultural industries, are in competition but are at the same time strongly connected. The number of smaller and medium sized cultural companies has increased, and a complex web of relationships has come into existence. Digitalization, internet and mobile communication have multiplied the ways to produce and access texts and opened the door for the information technology giants to compete with the cultural industries. The products of the cultural industries are increasingly borrowed and adapted on a global scale (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 2). The most often hypothesized cultural effects of globalization of media culture are listed by McQuail, (2010, p. 267) as synchronization of culture and a focus on novelty, fashion, celebrity, youth and sex; an undermining of national, regional and local cultures and promotion of unidirectional multiculturalism, commodification and hybridization of cultural symbols. The author adds that the value-free appearance of a global media culture is deceiving: "It embodies (...) many of the values of Western capitalism, (...) individualism, (...) consumerism, hedonism and commercialism" (McQuail, 2010, p. 267).

Additional significant developments are touched upon by Hesmondhalg (2012). Specifically, methods and deployment of audience research, marketing and the addressing of target groups has increased strongly. Deregulation of government policies has surged. The funds spent on advertising by businesses has grown strongly, whereby the cultural industries are only to some extent the main benefactor of the increase. The texts of the cultural industries have grown in volume, and variety, and the penetration by promotional and advertising information has increased.

### **3.7. Media Organizations, Decision-Making**

Creators of TV series supply media organizations, broadcasters or production companies with products and are commissioned and financed or employed by them. Media-organizational routines and procedures of selecting and processing exercise influence on content, states McQuail (2010, p. 277). Künzler, Hribal and Jarren (2010, pp. 226-228) see media organizations entailing four elements: the organization's structure coagulates in hierarchy and processes; it entails members and engages

actors; it has (normative) goals; it deposes of technological competences, knowledge, and equipment. A media organization operates in “a field of social forces” (McQuail, 2010, p. 280). The pressures and demands entail social and political pressures (legal and political control, pressure groups, other social institutions), economic pressures (competitors, advertisers, information agencies, owners), input pressures (events, an infinite supply of information and culture) and output pressures (distribution channels and audience demand). Not all factors constrain the media organization. Enabling influences come in the shape of, e.g., additional streams of revenue that emerge, or regulatory policies that protect media. The dominant work cultures in the organization are of management, technical and professional nature. Along the demarcation lines of the work cultures, conflicts often surface (McQuail, 2010, p. 281).

The relations with society reflect in ambiguous and non-transparent goals of media organizations that consist of a mix of utilitarian and normative aims. The objectives are profit, social influence, audience maximization, political, cultural, or religious goals, and/or serving the public. The relations with pressure and interest groups entail established pressure and lobby institutions, and media-external actors with practicing public relations. The successful advocacy groups are the ones that have goals compatible with the media industry and can summon a degree of public support on the issue. This tendency causes – pertaining to TV entertainment – “blandness, conformity, and an avoidance of controversy,” finds McQuail (2010, p. 290). Pertaining to societal relevance and portrayals of groups and issues, media advance better-organized and more socially centered groups or goals and marginalize weaker and more deviant ones.

Although often denied by media producers, in private-enterprise media like ad-based broadcasters or pay-TV channels, owners decree editorial and organizational policies that are followed by the employed media workers (McQuail, 2010, p. 291). These organizations may propagandize specific interests at the risk of losing market shares and reputation. PSBs are more constrained by obligations of balanced reporting and neutrality than privately owned media, but the constraints are less arbitrary, as McQuail (2010, p. 292) states, at least in the ‘Democratic Corporatist’ media systems of the conceptual framework of media and politics of Hallin and Mancini (2004, see also 5.2.2.1).

Regarding another kind of economic pressure, the financing of media content by advertising, as deployed by ad-based broadcasters and – to lesser extents – by (some) PSBs and by pay-TV, has an impact: the media content, design and scheduling match the consumer patterns of the target audiences and the advertisers’ interests (McQuail, 2010, pp. 292-293). Advertisers are “sensitive about the environment for their messages and edgy about controversy,” and media producers lean, when pressurized, towards self-censorship.

Pertaining to the output border of the media organization, the relations of the media organizations with audiences are often proclaimed the most important of all. Media organizations produce “spectacles as a way to creating audiences and generating profit and employment” (McQuail, 2010, p. 296). Ratings and sales figures merely enable ex-post evaluations of the audience resonance of a product. To predict

audience resonance of a new (edition of a) product, assessment by peer feedback is common in media organizations. In addition, in decision-making, organizations rely strongly on the track records of the involved communicators.

A core activity of media is gatekeeping. The concept refers to the selection of material by media for processing and subsequent dissemination to audiences. Gatekeeping is influenced by many factors (see chapter 5) and applies not only to the selection of news reports, but also to the editorial and production activities, as well as distribution and marketing of existing products in e.g., film and TV (McQuail, 2010, p. 309). The media's selection of different societal voices to give or withhold access is a central and highly contentious issue of gatekeeping.

McQuail (2010, p. 277) lists the degree of freedom that is possible in or with the media organization as a main issue of the relationship between media structure and content. In the same vein, Redvall (2013, pp. 9–10) investigates “the nature of collaboration and the possibility that certain media industries might create enabling as well as constraining conditions for creative work.” The degree of freedom is related also to the decision-making in media.

McQuail (2010, pp. 331-333) refers to work by Ryan and Peterson from 1982 and lists five models of decision-making in the media. In the factory-like “assembly line” model, skills and decisions are “built into the machinery.” Because media products must differ, overproduction occurs at all assembly stages. In the model of “craft and entrepreneurship,” the decision-making revolves around powerful brokers with a track record of compiling funding, input material and creative staff. In the third model, decisions are based on “convention and formula.” Experts in the relevant community “agree on a ‘recipe’” that articulates the ideal composition of the features of products in the respective genre. The fourth model articulates that the “audience image and conflict” production decisions are based on what the audience will like. This criterion evokes conflict for decision-makers. Lastly, in the “product image” framework, a product is assembled in such a way that the chance it will be accepted by decision makers in the next phase is highest, which translates to imitating successful products. In that light, McQuail (2010, p. 334) concludes that the publicity model (see also 3.2.) is very salient in media production and “communication is often primarily a business, and show business at that. (...). Appearance, artifice and surprise (...) often count for more than substance, reality, truth or relevance (...) [in] attracting attention.”

### **3.8. Media Workers, Typologies**

Individual media workers make decisions about content in advance of any response by the large, dispersed and anonymous audience and are thus uncertain about the resonance of their work (McQuail, 2010, p. 295). Constructing an image of the (ideal) audience is a solution for uncertainty. This ‘construct audience’ is commonly deployed by TV creators, finds also Lotz (2014). McQuail (2010, p. 294) reviews research showing that the audience often has little eminence to media

workers and a hostile attitude toward the audiences among media professionals is detected. McQuail states that this is evoked by resentment towards quantitative ratings as the primary quality criterion of the broadcasters. Media workers are also accredited with positive attitudes towards the audience. A sense of responsibility is discerned, and providing a helpful service contributes to the gratification of journalists. Informing, enlightening, edifying, as well as entertaining the audience all take center stage in the perception of communicators.

McQuail (2010, p. 301-303) discerns role dilemmas of workers in (foremost) news media that are sources of potential conflict. In addition to the often-observed conflict between lower- and higher-level media workers, the dilemmas pertain to participatory versus neutral-informational roles, creative and independent versus bureaucratic and routine work, achieving communicative goals versus satisfying consumer demands, and exercising personal expression versus fulfilling job requirements. The encompassing dilemma is, to McQuail (2010, p. 304), “freedom versus constraint in an institution whose own ideology places a value on originality and freedom yet whose organizational setting requires relatively strict control.”

In social science, typologies serve to detect, analyze, summarize and report on relevant information pertaining to the investigated issues originating from data (Tippelt, 2010, p. 116). In the following four typologies are briefly introduced.

McQuail (2010, pp. 283-285) distinguishes the journalists’ self-conceptions of neutral reporter and participant. The former is mostly adhered to. The role perceptions are predominantly the interpretative/investigative role and the informative disseminator, long before the adversary role. Wyss and Keel (2010, p. 362) arrive at a typology of ten role models of journalists that are part of varying journalism concepts. The ‘Transmitter’ (German original: “Übermittler”) type is detached from the subject and engages in ‘information journalism’ to portray reality. The ‘Partisan’ (“Parteigänger”) is ideologically motivated and practices ‘opinion journalism’ to influence views. The ‘Researcher’ (“Forscher”) works meticulously in the pursuit of ‘precision journalism’ that aims to generate knowledge. The ‘Analyst’ (“Analytiker”) wants to educate and engages in ‘interpretative journalism’ to provide orientation. The ‘Stylist’ (“Stilist”) is very conscious of language and engages in ‘literary journalism’ to create authenticity. The ‘Advocate’ (“Anwalt”) is an activist and deploys ‘advocacy journalism’ to evoke and spread solidarity. The ‘Detective’ (“Detektiv”) is persistent and practices ‘investigative journalism’ to detect undesirable phenomena and defects. The ‘Provocateur’ (“Provokateur”) adheres to a biased, partial perspective and pursues ‘position journalism’ to direct attention. The ‘Seller’ (“Verkäufer”) is client-oriented and engages in ‘marketing journalism’ to satisfy audiences and clients. The ‘Mediator’ is dialogue-driven and deploys the somewhat newer concept of ‘public journalism’ to enable the discovery of solutions.

Regarding journalists’ self-perception and expectations pertaining to their role, Wyss and Keel (2010, pp. 365–366) discern a “bouquet of pluralistic role preconceptions.” Over time, the neutral reporter remains the most salient and the “critics, commentators and advocates” are losing ground. The advice and service role self-images of journalists are increasing compared to 1998. The commercialized roles

remain least salient among journalists. Wyss and Keel find that the self-images pertaining to professional role vary strongly with media type and organizational conditions, but not with demographic factors. McQuail (2010, p. 287) cites work by Deuze from 2005 and names as the main elements public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics.

The work of Wyss and Keel focuses on journalists. Closer to the focus of this study is a typology by Burns from 1977, which is rendered by McQuail (2010, p. 295). Burns analyzed BBC staff and discerned four types of communicators that are summarized by McQuail (2010, p. 295). The pragmatic type aims for ratings that satisfy his/her employer or organization. The craft-oriented type aims for task- and product-intrinsic satisfaction and wants appreciation from peers. The organization-oriented type aims to reach the goals of his/her employer or organization (i.e. a cultural mission, political or commercial propaganda) that are internally assessed by the organization. The society-influencer type aims for leaving traces in the public domain, and “look [for validation] to their influential contacts in relevant social contexts” (McQuail, 2010, p. 295). To all, feedback from the personal social environment is of essence. In chapter 12, the types of creators are presented and compared to the types discussed in this subchapter.

McQuail (2010, p. 302) refers to work by Cantor (1971) who distinguishes three main types in a group of film producers employed at a major TV network: the ‘film-maker’ is well-educated and aims to move up to directing cinema feature films; the ‘writer-producer’ aims to communicate important messages to a large audience; the ‘career producer’ is less well-educated, older and focuses on the network goals and protection of the career status. Conflicts arose most often between the network and the writer-producers, with the former aiming for large audiences with risk-free stories and the latter insisting on mediating relevant messages. The career producer shares the goals of the network, and the filmmaker wants to be remunerated and enhance skills until it is time to venture elsewhere. Neither type challenges the network’s concept of content.

Most relevant to this study, von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, p. 1009) investigate the orientation of entertainment media workers in five European countries and come to reject “the common stereotype of a solely commercial mindset.” Based on work environment, demographical information and the discerned market, creative, common welfare and professional orientations, the authors arrive at a typology of entertainment producers and commissioners (von Rimscha & Siegert, 2011, pp. 1020-1022). The producer types are “creatives”, “marketers” and “veterans”. Creatives produce mainly fiction for ad-based TV (and cinema) and are less often found in the service of PSBs. Marketers are found at ad-based channels and mainly produce non-fiction entertainment. Veterans are less geared towards creativity and marketing than the other types and display more of the common welfare orientation. The type is mainly found at PSBs, at production of film and at non-fiction products. The commissioner types are “program buyers”, “show-managers” and “editor-producers.” The type of program buyers is most salient at procurement departments of ad-based broadcasters. They have a stronger market orientation and have less of

the professional and common welfare orientations than the other types. Show-managers are mostly found at ad-based broadcasters in non-fiction editorial department. The type displays all orientations, but the alignment with professionalism is strongest. Finally, editor-producers are mostly found in production of fiction at PSBs. The type is more oriented towards common welfare and creativity, less towards professionalism and marketing. Von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, p. 1021) discern similarities between the producer type of veterans and the commissioner type of editor-producers, and between the producer type of marketers and the commissioner type of show-managers. The producer type of creatives has no match at the commissioners.

In chapter 12, the ideal types that emerge in the data of the present study are introduced and in chapter 13, to reflect, I present a comparison of the ideal types with the typologies discussed in this subchapter.

## 4. Relevance of TV Series and Messages

A research gap is detectable regarding mediation in TV series. In this chapter, I present studies that discuss the significance of (messages in) TV series. In addition, several studies on audience effects that underline the importance of mediation in TV series are included.

### 4.1. Significance of TV Series

TV series attract large audiences and constitute a substantial share of the broadcasted offer and of the audience consumption. TV series are available through multiple broadcasting channels (advertising-based TV; pay-TV; public service broadcasting; subscription and on-demand internet streaming; various home viewing systems; and, occasionally, cinema) deploying various transmission technologies (online streaming and downloading, antenna, cable and satellite reception). Furthermore, in accordance with stipulations by Sommer and von Rimscha (2014), the narratives might be adopted from and for other media types. A TV series is in principle quite comprehensive and allows ample space for the communication of ideas in a variety of ways. Nesselhauf and Schleich (2014b) and Kallas (2014) compare TV series – with regard to the narrative playing field – to (epic) novels, whereas cinema films are comparable to short stories.

From the broadcasters' perspective, Redvall (2013, p. 37) sketches the continuing attraction of producing original TV series despite the high costs and the challenge to find the right material: reaching large domestic audiences whilst branding the organization, and exploring the potential of re-usage, syndication and (international) remakes. Redvall states in 2013 that many viewers in Denmark watch the series on linear TV when premiered, evoking an event character for “a constructed national family” (Morley, 2004, as cited by Redvall, 2013, p. 39).

Schlütz (2016) sees the TV series she investigates as significant media products that are at the same time exemplary for, as well as stand out in, the current convergent media landscape. Fictional serial narratives have a very long history. Seriality itself is a corner stone of any TV offer. The evolution of serial narratives is closely intertwined with the growth of media systems and, especially, with their commercialization (Mikos, 1994, as cited by Schlütz, 2016, p. 29). According to Schlütz, TV series enable audience involvement and loyalty and are thus essential to the maximization of revenue. Schlütz's (2016) focus lies on the development, characteristics and reception of TV series labelled (by practitioners, critics and, increasingly, scholars) as 'Quality TV', like *The Wire*, *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*. The author (2016) discerns a multidimensional entertainment experience of Quality TV series, that is framed by technological, economic and cultural convergence on the one hand, and the discourse space of culture and social position on the other hand. The investigated series have a two-dimensional character ('art' versus 'commodity') and are marketed in direct or indirect customer relations. The label Quality TV functions as a brand as well as a meta-genre, is a discourse



construct, and guides decision-making. The entertainment quality is a driver of demand for the series, influencing the selection and reception. Schlütz (2016) discerns complexity in narration and cast, intra- and intertextual referencing, as well as innovative contents and forms, accompanied by new patterns of consumption.

## **4.2. Mediation in TV Series**

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) investigate the mediation of messages in media content (2014, p. 1). The authors (2014) distinguish effects on media content and effects of media content. Since the media transmit socially constructed messages, which potentially cause audience effects (effects of media content), content is of importance. However, although “it may seem self-evident that content is the basis for media effects and needs to be closely examined, (...) many of the field’s most important lines of research have often not done so” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 4). The authors stipulate (2014, p. 4):

“We assume that the media portray people, events, and ideas in ways that differ systematically from their occurrence in (...) various social realities. Viewed another way, media content is fundamentally a social construction, and as such can never find its analog in some external benchmark, a ‘mirror’ of reality. Distortion in this sense becomes irrelevant; social reality is meaningful in, and of, itself. Media-constructed reality has taken its place alongside other social constructions. (...). If content is a construction, then to understand its special quality it is essential to understand the ‘constructing’.”

In the present study, I focus my attention on the effects on content and messages in a specific media entertainment product, i.e. fictional TV series. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) mainly discuss studies on information formats and journalism, but the authors emphasize that entertainment plays an important role in the mediation of messages. Von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, p. 1010) state that “entertainment influences our long-term values, the norms we obey in everyday life and the stereotypes we hold about other people or certain social spheres.” Dohle and Vowe (2014, p. 16) infer that the connections and similarities between the reception of political information and entertainment are often overlooked. Eilders and Nitsch (2014, p. 139) find that socio-political messages are frequently mediated in entertainment offerings. Fiction mediates (societally relevant) messages successfully by evading the recipients’ selection hurdles and opposition processes stemming from the avoidance of cognitive dissonance. Holbert et al. (2003) see political communication, specifically, as strongly interrelated with entertainment. Audiences are informed about politics by watching audiovisual content provided by news media, but also by consuming entertainment offerings, “the traditional distinctions between news and entertainment are no longer helpful” (Holbert et al., 2003, p. 429). Williams and Delli Carpini (2004, p. 1213) state:

“The new media environment creates a multiplicity of gates through which information passes to the public both in terms of the sheer number of sources (...), the speed with which information is transmitted (...), and the types of genres the public uses for political information (e.g. movies, music, docudramas, talk shows).”

The entertainment media provide factual information which evokes social and political beliefs (cf. Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001, p. 161). Von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, p. 1010) refer to work from Hermes from 2006, who “believes that, despite commercial or governmental influences on its production, entertainment offers room for implicit and explicit social criticism.” A large part of the (American) public does not, or is not able to, clearly distinguish between ‘factual’ information and ‘fictional’ entertainment (Holbert et al., 2003, p. 430). Von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, p. 1014) refer to work from Sigel from 2004, who “finds that many [entertainment and fiction] shows did alter their programming” after the 9/11 attacks and focused on mediating important messages. Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2013) compares the docudramas *The Reagans* and *The Path to 9/11* and finds that the political significance of entertainment texts does not lie solely in their value as stand-alone texts, nor in their direct influence on political knowledge, attitudes, opinions, and behaviors, but in their ability to instigate politically relevant discussions in other media venues.

### **4.3. Audience Effects of Messages**

Von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, p. 1010) find: “Entertainment television is inclusive, linking the domains of the public and the private for the broadest range of people in terms of age, gender and ethnicity.” Exploring the recipients’ side of the mediation of messages goes largely beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, some basic notions of the more commonly deployed classic theories are briefly introduced to emphasize the relevance of dissemination of messages about society. In addition, it can generally be said that many of the introduced studies in this literature review implicitly or explicitly adhere – to a certain extent – to these theories. Pertaining to the significance of the type of content discussed in the present study, the mechanisms resulting in the adoption of values and norms from, nowadays, a range of audiovisual input are elucidated by the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1994) and the cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). The latter theory proposes a multi-directional process (Gerbner et al., 1986), in which the view of society portrayed by ‘television’ is integrated in the recipients’ individual view. For this to occur, the exposure to those portrayals has to extend over a duration of time (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli & Shanahan, 2002).

The social cognitive theory, on the other hand, claims that through processes summarized as learning by observation, images, norms, values and modes of behavior are adopted (Bandura, 1994).

Despite a proliferation of channels, offered contents, and the accompanying audience fragmentation (Lotz, 2014) that causes strongly varying patterns of exposure on the side of recipients, the suggested effects on recipients’ world views

and behaviors are still considerable. After all, as is shown below, despite a great variation of messages, a prevalence of specific mediated worldviews can (still) be uncovered. These worldviews may be regarded as predominantly originating in the broader spectrum of white, male, heterosexual, middle- and upper-class, pluralistic, (neo-) liberal, consumerist, capitalist, and western first-world sets of norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

Producers of audio-visual fiction create preferred reading messages. The creators have many means of incorporating content elements in text, image and sound: plots, story arc development, character backgrounds and motivation, dialogues and interaction, staging and editing, acting performances, sets and locations, camera techniques, special effects, background sounds, music, etc. In the typical high-tech and costly format of TV series, all elements of the final product must be regarded as intentional (aside from the occasional mistake). The elements are included because they are assumed to disseminate or strengthen specific messages and evoke thoughts and emotions in an audience.

The relevance of socio-political messages and content elements of TV series is further enhanced by studies into concrete audience effects of messages in TV series. Ellithorpe, Ewoldsen, and Porreca (2015) describe the attraction and effects (experiments show enhanced respect for outgroups) of various TV series on 'supernatural' creatures and phenomena. Hastall et al. (2014), Richardson and Corner (2012), and Schlütz, Stock, Walkenbach, and Zehrfeld (2013) investigate the processing of portrayals of politics. Hastall et al. (2014) offer an overview of effects of messages in narratives on the recipients' perception of the political and social reality, and state that narratives are by nature very persuasive and that messages can be uncritically received (Hastall et al., 2014, p. 297). The authors identify an important mediating factor that influences the (extent of) effects of narrative contents on recipients: transportation indicates a phenomenon whereby the cognitive and emotional involvement with the events in the story is so large, that everything else is blended out. Identification, on the other hand, does not refer to the comprehensive process of involvement: here, the adoption of the perspective of a protagonist suffices to generate persuasive effects (p. 305). The authors (p. 305-306) distinguish between narrative realism (plausibility and consistency of a story) and external realism (congruence with the recipient's experiences). Whether the degree of realism influences persuasion effects of messages in fiction is a question that is not conclusively answered. However, Landreville and LaMarre (2013) find, in experiments, that perceiving a fictional political comedy as (narratively) realistic does correlate positively with a willingness to discuss and elaborate upon real existing political issues. Van Zoonen (2007) finds political messages in fiction too seldom investigated. The author analyzes audience reactions (IMDb postings) of viewers of political films and series. She finds reflection, judgement and expressions of hope which all assign relevance to the investigated fictional content pertaining to the development and maintenance of political citizenship: "popular film and television culture does not necessarily produce an impoverished political performance."

After establishing why it is important to expand the study of mediation to the entertainment format of TV series, I now focus on the influences on the content of TV series, and thus on the inclusion of messages perceived as societally relevant.

## 5. Influences on Content of TV Series

In this chapter I present studies that investigate the influences on content of TV series. An example illustrates the approach I take in this chapter. Sepinwall (2012, p. 27) states that “OZ was one of the most racially diverse casts ever assembled for a TV series. Even the progressive dramas of the 80s and 90s tended to have merely token minority representation.” Sepinwall relates the (perceived radical) content firstly to the intentions of creator Tom Fontana, who

“wanted to make sure the percentages of the prison population were representative. He wanted viewers to confront the dehumanizing nature of the prison experience but also use these criminals as proxies to talk about race, addiction, sexuality, religion, elder care, and any other hot-button issues he had on his mind.” (Sepinwall, 2012, p. 31)

The financier and broadcaster HBO, Sepinwall states (2012, p. 28), gave Fontana and his like-minded co-creators “the ability to do whatever they wanted, none of the old rules applied, it was utterly ‘let’s see what happens, let’s experiment’.” Sepinwall claims (2012, p. 31): “For a writer, this was liberating.” From the broadcaster’s perspective, Sepinwall explains (2012, p. 32): “Due to no advertising, ratings have never been an important metric, [HBO CEO] Chris Albrecht just wanted to make noise.” Sepinwall (2012, p. 102) explains about *Deadwood* and other series:

“It wasn’t until HBO freed them of the usual network constraints – intrusive creative notes, commercial breaks, words and images and morality that the FCC and advertisers wouldn’t allow and more – that they were really able to show what both they and television were capable of.”

HBO was in the process of positioning itself new in the TV landscape of the US in the 90s, and *Oz* was the first drama series that was in-house produced. Sepinwall sketches the aftermath of the broadcasting of *Oz*:

“*Oz* gave confidence and momentum to HBO. It helped them as they tried to define their series presence as bringing HBO viewers continuing stories and characters that they could not find on ad-supported television: complex, well told stories, featuring conflicted human characters that dealt with adult subject matters.” (Sepinwall, 2012, p. 32)

Finally, the TV series *Oz* reflects (among others) the perception, common to substantial shares of the population, of racial and class-based tensions as well as of the deficiencies of the law enforcement and justice systems in the country where the series was developed.

This example demonstrates how TV series’ content (and societally relevant elements in it) comes into existence. From studies, I distill the workings of enabling and constraining conditions of the creation of TV series.

In this study, two conceptual models of influences on media content are deployed. The “Hierarchy of Influences Model” is the main frame of reference and serves to structure the literature review, as well as the presentation of the analysis results on perception of influences of creators. On every level of influences, this

model offers a number of factors that can be investigated, and the hierarchical feature enables the formulating of assumptions about the strength of the influences. The second model, the “Structure of perceived Influences” serves to add notions about the perception of influences at heuristic points in the study.

In the subchapters 5.1 to 5.3, I discuss the conceptual models and in the subchapters 5.4 to 5.8, I review studies on constraining and enabling factors on each level of influences of the conceptual models. Subchapter 5.9 consists of an overview in bullet points and in 5.10, based on the reviewed works, I briefly sketch the research goals pertaining to the perception of influences on content of TV series and on the inclusion of societally relevant elements.

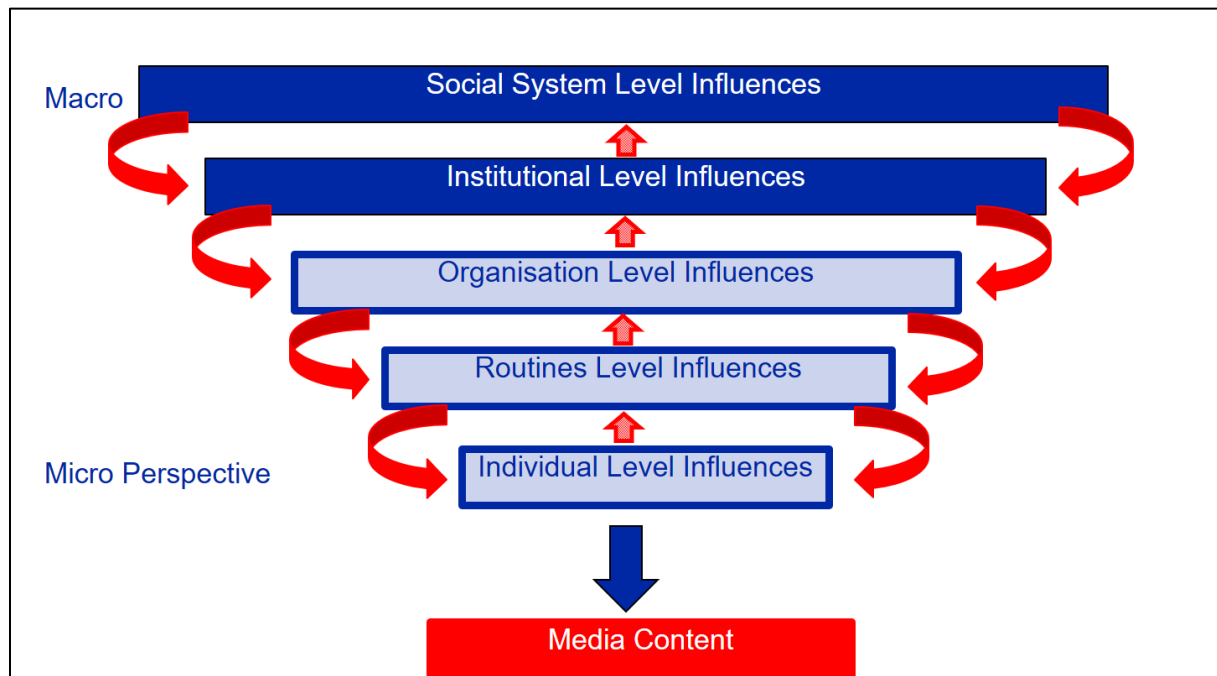
### **5.1. The “Hierarchy of Influences Model”**

For purposes of description, analysis, and/or interpretation of the multitude of influences on media (and TV series’) content, models offer a framework, an organizing tool. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) revised their work “Mediating the Message” from 1991/1996 in “Mediating the Message in the 21st Century.” The focus of the work remains mediation; the construction, production, and control of specific patterns of meaning contained in media content. The “Hierarchy of Influences Model” distinguishes five levels for analysis of influences on media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). This model is not specifically designed for analysis of perceptions of influences. More elaborately expressed than in the model of Hanitzsch (2009) and Hanitzsch et al. (2010), the levels ought to be regarded as hierarchical: influences and the resulting status quo on the more macro level stake out the playing field for exertion of influences and decision-making on the more micro level.

Moving through the levels, different influences, or “expressions of power” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 8), are taken into account. The social system level offers the macro perspective and consists of influences on decision-making from the system as a whole. “This includes ideological forces, (...) ideas and meaning in the service of interests and power” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 8). The social institution level describes influences of the “trans-organizational media field, how media organizations combine into larger institutions that become part of larger structured relationships as they depend on and compete with other powerful institutions” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 8). The organization level comprises of the influences of the larger entity within which the creator operates, the context of the practices of TV series’ production entities, the occupational roles, policies of the organizations, and the structure of the producing and/or distributing enterprise. It is important to note at this early stage, that the studies reviewed here, as well as the empirical data, on this level of influences mainly refer to what can be called the ‘client’ organization: the organization (company) that commissions, supervises, finances and usually distributes and broadcasts the TV series, and holds (some of) the rights to it. The routines level consists of the most-immediate enabling and constraining structures, patterns or routines within which the communicators work: the production team, or

network. Finally, the individual level consists of influences stemming from characteristics of the communicators, in this case the creator(s) of TV series. This level offers the micro perspective.

Figure 1. “The Hierarchy of Influences Model” of Shoemaker and Reese (2014)



Source: compiled by author, based on Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 13)

Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 5) argue that, in a sense, the media content is the dependent variable, “with which a number of independent variables are related and could be said to shape it.” The authors (Shoemaker & Reese, p. 1) state that the model takes into account the numerous factors influencing media content simultaneously and suggests how influences at one level interact with factors at another level. The authors (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 8) do not single out any level as the most important. However, in picturing the model as an upside-down cake with five layers (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 13), as shown in Figure 1, it becomes clear that if something on the higher-level changes, all the levels below it will (have to) change as well. Thus, influences on the more macro level result in a specific constellation, which determines the playing field for influences, and outcomes, on the more micro level. For example, the media landscape as a result of influences placeable at the social institution level, limits the playing field, the options, for all media organizations in a market’s media landscape. The two highest levels of the figure (dark blue) consist of the influences residing outside the media organizations, while the three lowest levels (light blue) consist of influencing forces within the (specific) organizations in the TV series industry.

The conceptualized direction of influences is top-down in the “Hierarchy of Influences Model” as depicted by the curved red arrows pointing in- and downwards from one level to the next in Figure 1: the more macro level status quo

determines the outcome of influences working on the more micro levels. On occasion, however, forces exerting influences on a lower, more micro level can also impact the status quo on the higher, more macro levels. These are then bottom-up influences. One example is the emergence of a 'new' type of media organization and its business model (e.g., social media companies meddling in distribution of news), a development placeable at the organization level of the model, that then impacts the total media landscape (which conceptually belongs to the higher level of the model). All media organizations are forced to adapt to the new status quo. Another example is reputable journalists, whose personal influences on media content (conceptually placeable at the individual level), sway the teamwork processes (on the higher routines level) and even the strategies and operations of their employer or client, the media organization (another conceptual level up). Thus, certain influences may contradict the conceptually proposed hierarchy of influences on media content. The small red arrows pointing upwards in Figure 1 indicate the bottom-up influences.

## 5.2. The “Structure of Perceived Influence” on Media Content

In studies on influences on journalism, Hanitzsch (2009) and Hanitzsch et al. (2010) distinguish two ways to empirically analyze influences on journalism: the manifestation of influences through analysis of actual journalistic content, and secondly, the analysis of influences as perceived by journalists themselves. The authors (Hanitzsch, 2009; Hanitzsch et al., 2010) present an overview of conceptual models of influences on journalism<sup>2</sup> (including Shoemaker and Reese’s model), and propose a “structure of perceived influence” (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8). The individual level influences stem from the decision makers’ “personal and professional backgrounds and orientations, as well as from their specific roles and occupational characteristics within the (...) organization” (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8). The media routines level “generates forces that have, over time, led to professional standardization of (...) production” (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8). The organizational level is relevant as “contemporary journalism has evolved into a highly organized endeavour” (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8). The media structures level consists of factors related “to the economic imperatives of journalism which are especially relevant in commercial news organizations” (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8). The authors state that these factors are also influential on non-profit media and public service broadcasting due to the high costs of media production. Finally, “The systemic level of influence incorporates the relevant social, cultural, and ideological contexts within which journalists work” (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8).

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<sup>2</sup> Models by Ettema (1987), Weischenberg (1995), Shoemaker and Reese (1996), Esser (1998), Donsbach (2000), McQuail (2000), Preston (2009).



### **5.3. Deployment of Conceptual Models of Influences on Content of TV Series**

Shoemaker and Reese (2014, xiv) recommend applying the hierarchical model of influences to the entertainment industry. For purposes of description, analysis, and/or interpretation of the multitude of influences on media (and TV series') content, models offer a framework – an organizing tool – for the reviewed studies and the empirical findings on influences on TV series' content. The perceived influences found in the sample are compared to the assumptions put forward in conceptual models by Shoemaker and Reese (2014). The presentation of studies, as well as of the results, begins with the macro perspective, the level of social system influences on content. It ends with the micro perspective: the level of individual influences on content of TV series. Redvall (2013, pp. 9–10) investigates “the nature of collaboration and the possibility that certain media industries might create enabling as well as constraining conditions for creative work” and refers thus to influences on content of TV series placeable on different levels of the conceptual models.

Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 241) state that the hierarchical model of influences is used to investigate factors at various levels. They (2014, p. 244) review studies using the model as a guide for interpretation. In this study, I present - per conceptual level - investigations of constraining and enabling influences on content of TV series that are distilled by scholars and industry observers. In the empirical part, I analyze the constraining and enabling influences on creation of TV series as perceived by creators and sector experts and I localize and interpret these “through the lens of the model” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 244). The findings are contrasted to the structure of perceived influences of Hanitzsch (2009) and Hanitzsch et al. (2010), to assure that interpretations are feasible in investigations of perceived influences.

### **5.4. The Social System Level Influences on TV Series**

#### **5.4.1. Conceptual Factors**

Influences on the content of TV series can be placed at the most macro level, the social system level (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), the systemic level of Hanitzsch et al. (2010, p. 8), “incorporates the relevant social, cultural, and ideological contexts within which journalists work”. At this level, Shoemaker and Reese suggest investigating the powerful in society and how power is exercised through the media (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 65). Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 69) introduce four interacting and interrelating social subsystems. Ideological, cultural, economic and political subsystems influence media content. The media “operate with each of these subsystems in the process of system maintenance, (...) as agents of social control” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 74). The central questions on this level are formulated by Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 77) as follows: Who has power? On what is power



## **5.5. The Social Institution Level Influences on TV Series**

### **5.5.1. Conceptual Factors**

Influences stemming from the relationship of the media with other institutional power exerting realms in society are to be located on the social institution level of Shoemaker and Reese (2014), and on the media structures level of Hanitzsch et al. (2010). Media and content have to be understood in the context of relations to other fields. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) distinguish social institution level influences (factors external to media organizations) from factors working inside the media organizations. Redvall (2013, p. 15) mentions influences on TV series placeable on this level:

“While there are obvious similarities related to (...) technological innovations or transnational trends in the development of television between countries, there are also (...) nationally specific issues and challenges that are important for the understanding the writing and production of (...) drama in a certain context.”

The changing media landscape and proliferation of platforms for TV series are developments influencing the content of TV series. In addition, attention goes out to possible influences on content exerted by: media sources, interest groups, media watchdog groups, inter-media influences, media education, regulations and state control, media policy, and institutional relationships with corporate elites and financial institutions (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Diverging from Shoemaker and Reese (2014), influences that (have the potential to) impact all – as opposed to specific – organizations in the TV series sector, are in this study regarded as organization-external factors, and are incorporated on the social institution level. In locating these factors at the more macro level, I thus propose a stronger determining influence on the playing fields of the more micro levels of organization, routines and individual influences. These influences are related to costs, financing, remuneration, and regulations in the TV series sector.

### **5.5.2. Developments in Cultural Industry TV**

McQuail (2010, p. 264) sketches relevant developments regarding the production and distribution of TV series. He sees the TV production and broadcasting outside the USA increasing in the last decades. More countries are (increasingly) self-sufficient regarding TV content and satisfy the national demand. With respect to films and TV series, however, the US-American domination is still observable, also through the adaption of American formats to local conditions. McQuail (2010, p. 264) considers the national public service models to play a big role in mediating national culture(s).

Despite policies to privilege European productions in the EU, the trade deficit with the USA in audio-visual products remains (McQuail, 2010, pp. 264–265). The most viewed TV content is home-produced, but the imported US-American fare forms a large share of the program in most countries. The bulkiest segment of the import is fiction, which reflects the high costs of this type of TV program to domestic producers. The US distributors offer fiction for far lower costs and practice bundling of high value content with subprime products, creating “over-supply” (McQuail, 2010, p. 265).

Pertaining to consumption, linear viewing and the use of TV sets have been strongly decreasing and are progressively replaced by time-shifting, free and/or paid-for consumption of video content. Thereby viewers use a range of digital and analog reception technologies (internet, cable, satellite, and terrestrial aerial reception) and content viewing devices (TV set, PC, mobile phone/smartphone and tablet computer) (Hesmondhalg, 2012).

In the USA and some Western countries, competition from strongly increasing numbers of content suppliers leads to the strong erosion of market shares of the major networks in many countries. But, as Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 349) states “the revenues of television industries grew rapidly during the 2000s (...), the continuing growth of paid-for television (...) is predicted to lead to further increases in revenue.” Westcott, Downs, Loucks and Watson (2018) see in a consultancy firm report a continued trend towards streaming of video and away from linear TV consumption. The losses in (time spent on) linear TV viewing are compensated by the increase in (mobile) video consumption. The time spent on consuming video content and TV series through online and traditional broadcasters’ streaming services and content players may even be increasing despite a competition of a widening range of possible leisure activities that has been growing for decades. Thus, pertaining to TV series at least, Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 350) correctly finds that “the internet is not *replacing* television and other cultural forms; it is *supplementing* them (...). Nor is the internet *swallowing up* television. Instead, the internet and television are *hybridizing*.”

Napoli (2009) and Lotz (2014) highlight the increase of fragmentation and autonomy of the TV audience as the two dominating tendencies in the TV industries in the last decades. According to Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 353), audience autonomy ought to consist of the thus far unachieved aim of meaningful “control over the circulation of experiences, ideas and knowledge.”

The proliferation of digital TV has consequences for the TV series industry. Firstly, a strategic alliance of telecom, cable, ICT and cultural companies established the resources-intensive systems, of which the most consequential facets are rapid and high-volume transmission, restriction of access (encrypting and decoding features), and an increase of billing and advance program information features. Secondly, the strongly increased demand for content provided certain market players with an abundance of leverage. These actors are: a) the owners of rights to catalogues of content; b) the US content creation business, Hollywood film studios, networks, premium cable/satellite suppliers and streaming services; c) independent production

companies (often financed by venture capitalists) in Western countries that internationally market programs and formats; d) the celebrated category of creatives, and their agents and managers. Thirdly, distribution “remains central to the industrial dynamics of television in the digital age” (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 355) and distributors exercise their power over the offer of channels and supply of content to distort competition by privileging their own products. As a result, the commercialization of TV has progressed strongly and new possibilities for commodification of cultural products have arisen. Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 355) concludes that sections of affluent consumers do not seem to mind paying for content that is not much better than what existed before. Hesmondhalg’s assessment of the content on offer is not congruent with the findings of Lotz (2014) and, regarding TV series, with the conclusions of Schlütz (2016). Both authors infer that TV content is more varied and of higher quality. Nevertheless, by and large, the statement holds true that “for all the rhetoric about choice and interactivity, much of it derived from digital utopianism, digital television ultimately remains the centralized, top-down medium that developed in the era of analogue broadcasting” (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 355).

### **5.5.3. The Media/TV Landscape**

Developments in an industrial landscape affect the industry’s products. Although Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) conceptual framework for distinguishing models of media and politics is drawn up for comparative investigation of journalism, it also offers contextual information on the media landscapes in the sampled European countries and on the media system of the USA that figures prominently in the literature on TV series. The framework considers as dimensions of the media system: structure of the media market, political parallelism<sup>3</sup>, degree of professionalism of media work, and the role of the state in the media system. In combination with a distinction of ‘types’ of democracy, based on another five dimensions (role of the state; democracy type; pluralism type; degree of pluralism; degree of rational-legal authority), the authors then arrive at three models of media and politics: the ‘Liberal,’ the ‘Democratic Corporatist,’ and the ‘Polarized Pluralist’ models.

The media systems of Canada and the UK (as well the US) are classified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as part of the North Atlantic ‘Liberal’ Model; The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark are categorized as belonging to the North/Central European ‘Democratic Corporatist’ Model. Italy is assigned to the Mediterranean ‘Polarized Pluralist’ Model.

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<sup>3</sup> Political parallelism is measured by: a) extent to which media reflect distinct political orientations and allegiances, and the orientation and professional practice of journalists; b) the instances and nature of links between media and political organizations; c) the instances of former political actors becoming media workers; d) the degree to which career advancement of media personnel depends on political affiliations; e) the extent of media audiences’ partisanship.

Pertaining to the first dimension of the categorization of media systems, the structure of the TV series market is largely similar for the countries in the sample: PSBs, advertising-based channels and pay-TV channels are involved in the financing, production, and distribution TV series. In most countries, the two former organization types, PSBs and ad-based TV, divide the largest audience shares in the (rapidly declining) market of terrestrial/digital 'free' linear and playback TV. The subscription-based streaming services and satellite-TV grow (to varying degrees) in terms of program and paying audience. The USA has no PSB that engages in the TV series market, and a fierce competition for audiences has arisen between the numerous suppliers of TV series. The importance of public service broadcasters in the production and dissemination of TV series in the UK, as well as in Québec, Canada, drives these countries in the direction of the Democratic Corporatist Model. The North Atlantic 'Liberal' Model of media systems displays features of interest in this study regarding the USA, the UK and Canada. Regarding political parallelism, Hallin and Mancini's findings are politically 'neutral' commercial media organizations; information-oriented journalism; internal pluralism (in the UK and Québec external pluralism); professional broadcasting governance; formally autonomous media organizations and systems. A strong professionalization of media work is found by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and self-regulation is practiced, but not institutionalized. Regarding the TV series production in the UK and Québec, the qualification of the media system as 'Liberal' bases only on the degree of professionalism in production and distribution, and on the degree of autonomy of commercial producers in the countries.

The 'Democratic Corporatist' media system entails the in this study relevant countries The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Hallin and Mancini (2004) list: a tradition of external pluralism in the national press; a tendency to shift from party-affiliated toward 'neutral' commercial press; inclusion of all social groups in the political consensus-building process on media regulation (also regarding public broadcasting); substantial autonomy for media organizations. The degree of professionalism in these media systems is high, and self-regulation is institutionalized and enforced by mandated external organizations. A high level of state interventionism is found by Hallin and Mancini (2004), whereby the freedom of the press is preserved: subsidization of media organizations (incl. PSBs) in varying forms is common. The TV series industries in the UK and Québec are in line with the features of the 'Democratic Corporatist' model.

The 'Polarized Pluralist' model of Hallin and Mancini (2004) is assigned to Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. Hallin and Mancini (2004) make out large degrees of political parallelism: high external pluralism and strong commentary/opinion-orientation in media; governance by parliament/government over broadcasting; domination over public service broadcasting by political systems; high degrees of state interventionism and subsidization; censorship; weaker professionalization of media workers; instrumentalization of media by political forces. The deregulation of media in Italy (as well as in Spain, Portugal and Greece)

during the 70s and 80s was - despite a tradition of political interference - not strongly controlled by a political licensing system, but by media corporations themselves. Hesmondhalg (2013, p. 141) points at dismal results for the quality of media content.

The US TV industry produces a large share of the disseminated TV series in the US and Europe, as well as the best-known and most successful examples. Thus, it is warranted to devote a significant degree of attention to the US TV (series) industry. The industry has been going through dramatic changes since its beginnings, changes that influenced the producers, products, and contents, as well as the consumption and audiences. Lotz (2014) investigates in great detail the structural developments in US TV since the medium's inception. She shows the influences these developments exert on the production and content of TV (series) and discerns three phases in the US TV landscape: the network, multi-channel and post-network eras.

### **'The Network Era'**

NBC (National Broadcasting Company) was the first network to start scheduled broadcasting in 1939, followed by CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System) and ABC (American Broadcasting Company). Lotz (2014) sees only marginal changes occurring during the first forty years: the production, quality, genres and broadcasting schedules remain largely identical. The networks adhered to mass production for mass audiences and generated income by selling advertising time, and by syndication of programs to other (affiliated) TV stations (Curtin & Shattuc, 2009; Havens & Lotz, 2017). The essential features of the network era can be summarized as a bottleneck: a buyers' oligopoly for the networks on the content production market (input), and a sellers' oligopoly for the networks regarding the distribution of TV content (output), combined with linear TV consumption governed by network program schedules.

### **'The Multi-Channel Era'**

More relevant for this study, that investigates the current production of TV series, are the eras that followed the network era. In the directly following multi-channel era, many TV series were produced that inspired contemporary creators and function to this day as reference frames for them.

From 1948 onward, and accelerating in the 60s-70s, the dissemination of TV content by analogue cable replaced aerial antenna transmission. With the drastically enlarging capacity of cable transmission, and the loosening of market entry restrictions<sup>4</sup>, the number of suppliers and offered contents increased steadily. Lotz (2014) places the first culmination of the proliferation of channels (in the US) in the 80s. She (2014) names the main features of the multi-channel era in US TV: new cable channels and TV networks (FOX, The WB, UPN) compete with the three original networks; technology (video recorders, analogue cable, remote controls) enables time shifting and avoidance of advertising by the viewers; regulation<sup>5</sup> of TV production

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<sup>4</sup> Market entry restrictions based essentially on traditional ambitions to control TV broadcasting, because of TV's assumed large influence on public opinion. The restrictions were upheld under the pretext of scarcity of frequencies; an argument that was relatively early rendered obsolete by transmission technology developments.

<sup>5</sup> Most prominently among these regulations are the "Financial Interest and Syndication Rules" ("Fin-Syn Rules"), that were imposed in 1970, slightly relaxed in the 80s and abolished in 1993. The imposing of the rules opened the market for highly successful independent TV series production companies (like e.g., Mary Tyler Moore, Norman Lear) that created innovative and

and distribution inhibits vertical integration causing the established big three networks to lose market control; subscription channels without advertising emerge.

The aforementioned factors laid the foundation for audience fragmentation and the proliferation of contents serving increasing amounts of specific interest niches. Johnson (2009) coins the term boutique system for the supply system of cable TV. Cable channels could, due to (basic or prime) subscription revenues, afford (to produce) target group-oriented content, whilst the ad-based networks suffered from decreasing ratings and advertising revenue. The networks were forced to increasingly deploy conservative mass appeal content strategies, for fear of the audience dwindling further. Although this line of reasoning holds generally true, Thompson (1996) demonstrates that in certain constellations of the TV series market, the competition between the three classic networks inspires high-quality innovative series: the worst rated network in a situation of diminishing overall market shares (due to cable competition) is forced to take chances on content. NBC produced a string of highly acclaimed (and very successful) TV series, most prominently among these *Hill Street Blues* (1981-87), a series that received a record number of Emmy awards, only to be surpassed much later by *The West Wing* (2000).

### **The Post-Network Era**

Lotz (2014) sees the Post-Network Era as the period in which time, place and content limitations to the consumption of TV are overcome: any TV content, anywhere, anytime. A power shift from the supply side of TV content to the demand side takes place: increased digitalization, the expanding internet and new technology widen the consumers' choice and enable them to take control. Schlütz (2016) sees the contents and the consumption changing with the innovations, and Lotz (2014) emphasizes the changes in production, distribution and financing under the influence of the radically increased audience independence. In addition, the key features of the era are according to Lotz (2014): the emergence of new advertising strategies, and the increased measurability of audience consumption. In addition to the eras that Lotz (2014) discerns, other delineations are made out by scholars.

### **Further delineations**

Schlütz (2016) uses the term TV IV, a period in the TV series landscape beginning in 2010, in which globalization, digitalization, convergence and audience independence culminate and impact the TV series industry strongly. Lotz (2014) does not distinguish additional periods and features after the year 2000, but the emergence and rapid expansion of online consumption of the format previously known as 'TV series' can be regarded as a significant rupture. The landscape of the era after ca. 2005 does not represent a radical breach with the previous period and characteristics, but consists of a strong acceleration, intensifying and internationalization of the tendencies of the post-network era, that were – as far as production, content and consumption is concerned – at first predominantly a US

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socially critical series. The abolishment of the rules opened the door to conglomerates: the take-over of TV production and distribution companies became economically more attractive (cf. Lotz, 2014).



phenomenon (see, for example, the inception of premium subscription TV, as well as the launch of web-streaming services: both occur earlier in the US than in Europe).

Sperb (2017) refers to work by Bennett from 2011 and poses that the fragmentation of the TV audience evoked by digitalization and convergence increases dramatically from the mid-2000s on. Based on a review of studies a summary of outstanding features of the era after the mid-2000s, Sperb (2017) distinguishes: an accelerating decrease in use of the TV technology and in linear TV consumption; an increasing globalization of distribution of serial fiction exemplified by worldwide synchronization of the marketing of new series; audience loyalty that bases increasingly on content brands instead of program schedules and broadcaster brands; value-creation models of TV series based on marketing by multi-platform web-based distribution; adaption to binge-watch user patterns by eradication of phased diffusion; further loss of market shares and revenues of the advertising-based networks.

### **The surge of streaming services**

The time-line of web-streaming services demarcates, in my opinion, the Post-Network Era with respect to TV series. In 2006, Amazon launches its video-on-demand service, Amazon Video, in the US. Netflix moves away from its core business of renting out DVD and starts its US streaming service in 2007. In 2008, the web-streaming service Hulu launches. Netflix initiates the international expansion (and customization) of its streaming service with a Canadian service in 2010. The UK and Scandinavia follow in 2012, Switzerland and Germany in 2014. By 2017 Netflix is by and large available worldwide after the cooperation with Chinese partners is announced. Streaming services do not only distribute, but also begin to produce original content. Netflix premiered the complete first season of *House of Cards* in one go in 2013. The national services of Netflix in bigger markets also finance and produce local original content, and the company is thus a player on the national level of fiction production in many countries. The internationalization strategy of Netflix is adopted by amongst others the older premium content supplier HBO. The company has launched (with varying degrees of success) divisions in some countries, partners with other firms in many countries and finances local original content.

The business models and strategies of content providers have to be adapted not only to large market and media landscape changes, but also to evolving and gradually establishing audience-wide uses, tastes and demands. Mittell (2015) sees the main pressure towards innovation stemming from audiences, a pressure that results in an increase in the quality of TV series. However, the chronology of the phenomena described in this section places technological developments at the origin of the significant changes. Shoemaker and Reese's model sorts influences of factors placeable on five different levels. The audience also exerts an influence. This is located on the organization level if pertaining to the audience of a particular organization. But the audience as a whole exerts influences that are located on the institutional level, in that certain features of the audience influence the entire TV (series) industry. The developments enabled the strong proliferation of channels,

various suppliers and business models, producing content that at the same time evokes and follows the media consumption of varying audience groups.

The trade press attests the changing media landscape a large influence on the content of TV series. Martin (2014) attributes conditions that facilitated the upsurge and content alterations of TV series to “a proliferation of channels (both broadcast and Internet), all with a fierce hunger for content” (Martin, 2014, p. 10).

Sepinwall (2012, p. 367) emphasizes the evolution in the TV series industry in terms of a line of products each paving the way for successful successors: “Mad Men could have been a fluke. If HBO hadn’t followed *Oz* with the Sopranos and then *Six Feet Under* or if FX hadn’t followed *The Shield* with *Nip/Tuck* (...), we’d look at (...) this era very differently.”

The business and technological upheaval opened the door for creativity and thus for content diverging from what was commonplace before the end of the nineties (Martin, 2014, p. 14).

“The revolution in what we watched was inseparable from a revolution in how we watched. (...) DVDs represented a significant extra revenue stream (...), along with (...) digital video recorders, online streaming, on-demand cable, (...) file sharing, (...) and more, they had introduced a new mode of television viewing” (Martin, 2014, p. 14).

Types of controversial content that were once confined to cinema or books could now appear on the in-house screen, and “shifting economics revealed that maybe it had always been advertisers, rather than audiences, who were so adverse to difficult characters” (Martin, 2014, p. 85).

The evolution does not halt. Sepinwall describes the current TV landscape pertaining to series as follows: “The fracturing of the audience (...) has accelerated even more (...). Network shows now get renewed with ratings so small that a few years ago, they would have gotten every executive associated with them fired for cause.”

Netflix (and to a more modest degree, other streaming services) revolutionizes the TV landscape, the way series are accessed and watched. Cord-cutting undermines the business model of the more traditional suppliers who provide the lion’s share of the streaming offer, says Sepinwall (2012, pp. 431-433): “The grenade that has really blown everything to bits has been Netflix” (p. 431). For the format TV series itself, the developments are not negative: “In a medium where viewing habits are changing almost as fast as the technology to support them, the quality drama has become the business’s killer app” (Sepinwall, 2012, p. 433).

#### **5.5.4. Public Service Broadcasting in the Media Landscape**

PSBs play an important role in the TV series landscape in the sampled countries. Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 139) summarizes, based on work from Siune and Hultén from 1998, the changes in television funding systems between 1980 and 1997. In Table 1 the countries included in the sample of this study are listed. The information in column ‘2018’ is based on observations by the author. The trend away

from public monopoly systems towards dual systems that consist of (increasingly constrained) public broadcasters in addition to (increasingly deregulated) advertising-based, privately owned broadcasters, is clear. The ‘dual system’ that is now omnipresent is complemented by pay- and subscription-based TV suppliers (including streaming services) in all sampled countries.

*Table 1. Changes in television funding systems in selected countries*

<b>System</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2018</b>
Public monopoly – license fee only	Belgium (B), Denmark (DK), Norway (N), Sweden (S)			
Public monopoly – mixed revenue	Germany (D), The Netherlands (NL), Switzerland (CH)	DK, NL, CH	CH	
Dual system	Italy (I), United Kingdom (UK), Canada (CDN)	B, D, N, S, I, UK, CDN	DK, NL, B, D, N, S, I, UK, CDN	CH, DK, NL, B, D, N, S, I, UK, CDN

Source: compiled by author, based on Hesmondhalg (2012)

Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 140-151) offers an analysis of the attack on public service broadcasting that started in the 1980s and impacted the current media landscape in the European countries where the respondents interviewed for this study work. Hesmondhalg (2012, p 141) discerns a trend in Europe (as in the USA) towards ‘marketization’, which refers to “the process by which market exchange (the buying and selling of goods, services and rights) has increasingly come to permeate the cultural industries” (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 418).

Overall, the coalition of pro-marketization interest groups entails the electronics industry that wants to sell more hardware and cable and satellite TV lobbies that want to provide commercial services. In addition belong to the coalition: privatized postal and telecom companies that want to develop and exploit new media technologies and maintain dominant market positions, newspaper publishers that aim to diversify and lock-out competition for advertising revenue and advertising organizations that want to gain outlets, strengthen market positions and protect the sector interests. Finally, included in the coalition are also governments that aim to enhance the national economic performance and attract media investors, political parties that want to drive a neo-liberal agenda and promote the business interests of their prime sponsors and clientele and the European Commission that wants to liberalize European markets.

On the opposing side, one finds the PSBs themselves that want to defend their mandates, organizations, tasks, funding, and aim for continuation of public resources. Public service supporters aim to protect their interests and unions strive to protect (conditions of) employment. The coalition also entails left-wing parties that promote a public service ethos, communitarian values and labor interests (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 141, based on work by Humphreys from 1996).

Hesmondhalg (2012, pp. 141-144) sees the substantial changes in broadcasting policy beginning in the mid-80s. The changes took on different forms and brought forward varying results in the countries where the respondents in the sample of the present study work, see also subchapters 5.6.3 and 5.6.4.

### **5.5.5. Additional Influences**

In the following, attention is devoted to general economical facets of production of TV series, and an influence on content is on occasion described. Newman (2012) sketches the chances and threats of file-sharing for the producers of serialized fiction. Kompare (2006) did the same for DVD boxes a few years earlier, and found adaptations of content as a consequence of the possibilities that the new outlet offers. Alvarado (2000) discusses in-depth the value of TV drama, and sees immaterial profits like reputational advantages and attraction of talent for production companies. Adalian (2015) investigates the intense competition in the field of high-prized series and sees Netflix outpacing HBO in numbers of series to be produced. Scholars in addition investigate the adaptation of business strategies like sales (block booking) and marketing (content aggregation) in the new TV landscape (cf. Torre, 2009; Vonderau, 2015). Holt (2013) offers an example of the regulatory content restrictions in a case study of the series *NYPD Blue*.

Regarding the portrayal of gender and ethnicity, in the subchapters 6.4 and 6.5, I elaborate on instances of pressure exercised by interest and media watchdog groups on the broadcasters of TV series and the producers of content.

The dynamics between media and other institutions in society, other institutional power sources, are also located at this level of the conceptual model. Hesmondhalgh (2012) acknowledges the proliferation of channels and subsequent increase in contents on offer within the last decades. He finds, however, that skewed power relations dominate the societal institution media, and this distortion prevents any valuable increases in real diversity in media content (in the sense of representation of gender, class, race, and mediation of relevant democratizing and emancipating opinions).

The trade press investigates factors at this level as well. Production and distribution of TV series are in many instances (first and foremost) a business and are as such subjected to general (business-) economic influences on the creators of series and on gatekeeping of content. Kallas (2014) interviewed TV writers. In her work, TV writer Warren Leight explains the attraction of TV to writers in economic terms: independent movies and theatre plays are hard to realize and have a limited audience appeal. Cinema production companies are big and inflexible corporations.

By contrast, even a small cable TV series stands on a relatively solid economic base, making these projects and the companies behind them a viable option to creative and opinionated talent (Kallas, 2014, p. 42). This attraction also has unfavorable consequences: TV writer Jenny Bicks states (Kallas, 2014, p. 70) that the fees for reputable TV writers have decreased under the influence of a vast influx of competitors from film, theatre, and literature.

The costs of TV series are strongly inflating, and a consequence is the strengthening of financiers' influence, observe the interviewees (Kallas, 2014). TV writer Jenny Bicks sees budgets for TV series rising to astronomical levels with HBO as the biggest spender on production costs<sup>6</sup> (Kallas, 2014, p. 69). Bicks concludes that TV series' showrunners might be considered all powerful but in the final verdict do not finance their own shows, which reduces their leverage drastically (Kallas, 2014, p. 67). TV writer/showrunner Tom Fontana confirms that his company cannot finance projects, but is instead hired by producing companies (Kallas, 2014, p. 56). Restrictions to the narrative space and the inclusion of messages in series are also of financial nature. Sepinwall (2012, p. 438) sees shorter 'seasons' emerging (mainly for expensive high-end drama), from originally 22 to 12 and now down to 10 episodes, even when produced by well-endowed providers like HBO and Netflix.

Despite all the talk about the creative freedom and power of creators of TV series, profit-oriented corporations remain just that. TV writer Jane Espenson believes that artistic freedom is generally overestimated (Kallas, 2014, p. 102). Although increasingly 'niche' series are produced, essentially one still produces for a corporate entity with forceful demands and expectations. Kallas (2014, pp. 173–174) concludes that absolute artistic freedom over content is inexistent. He states that "writers are told what to do by showrunners, who in turn have to bow to financiers: even "Quality TV" is subjugated to powerful entities, and is merely part of a permission-based culture" (2014, pp. 173–174).

Regulation of TV content is placeable at this institutional level of influences in the model of Shoemaker and Reese (2014). Kallas (2014) illustrates the impact of regulation in her interviews: the TV writers mainly refer to ad-based broadcasters pertaining to regulatory constrictions. Advertising as a common influence distills into policies and actions of organizations that are discussed below.

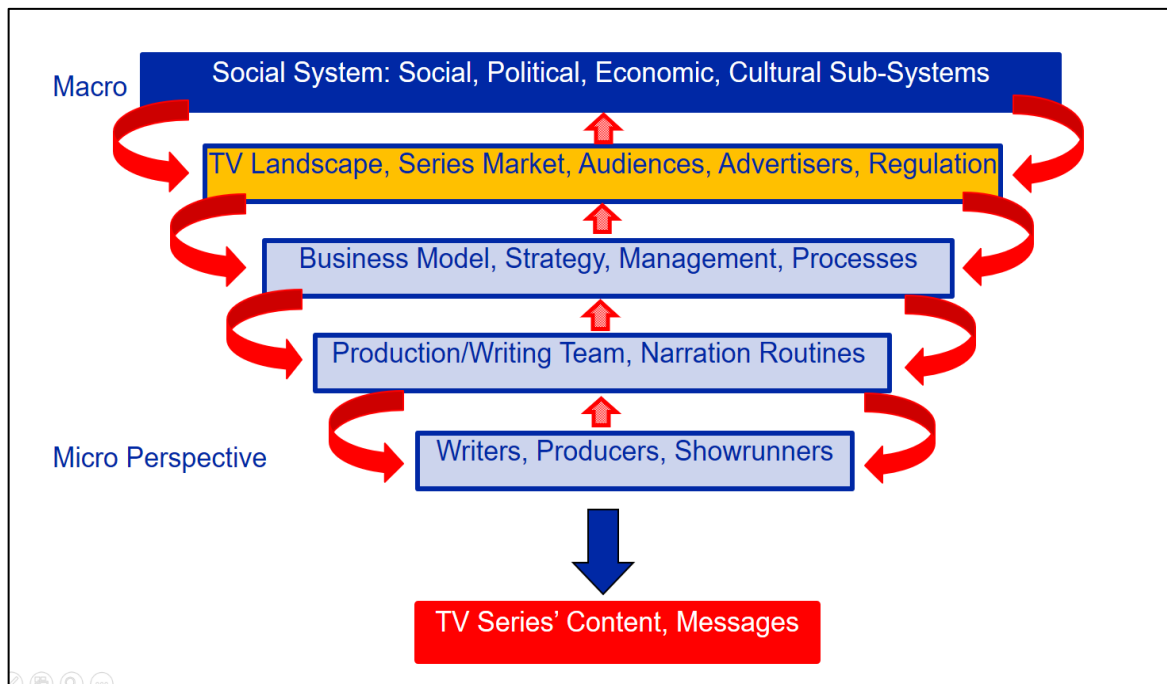
### **5.5.6. Summary**

The findings in literature are summarized in the figure below.

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<sup>6</sup> At present, Netflix and Amazon in particular are outspending HBO and other premium cable companies by far.

Figure 3. The social institution level influences on TV series' content



Source: Compiled by author, model based on Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 13)

## 5.6. The Organization Level Influences on TV Series

### 5.6.1. Conceptual Factors

The media organization represents a complex system with specialized parts and routines and provides the larger context of the production of content by teams of creators. "A media organization creates, modifies, produces and distributes content to many receivers," Shoemaker and Reese state (2014, p. 130). The authors attest organization level factors "a critical impact on media content" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 163). They propose looking at influences on media content from factors pertaining to the organization: ownership, membership, policies, goals, actions, rules, interactions with other organizations, bureaucratic structure, economic viability and stability, target audiences, and influence from advertisers (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 130).

The primary goal of most media organizations is economic profit. Secondary goals, integrated in this predominant objective, are "producing a quality product, serving the public, achieving professional recognition" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 139). The goals of public service broadcasters are not elaborated upon by Shoemaker and Reese but are largely defined by the organizations' mandates as formulated by national governments and their media and regulatory politics.

Redvall (2013, p. 31) applies the systems model of Csikszentmihalyi (from 1988) that recognizes a multitude of facets to be investigated regarding the creation of TV series:

“One can approach the writing and production (...) as a system where writers [individuals with a personal background] with an individual talent, training and track record propose ideas for potential TV series. These ideas build on trends, tastes and traditions in the domain [of culture] and have to find acceptance by the experts in the [particular] field [of society], where projects are assessed based on the mandate, management and money of the institution involved.”

### 5.6.2. Business Models

Trade press texts on the creation of TV series emphasize the importance of the commissioning organization, the ‘client’, i.e. the organization that enables a new TV series by financing, distributing and broadcasting it. Often a precarious relationship between the creators in the producing team and the client organization is painted. In this section, the enabling and constraining factors of the creation of TV series originating at the client organizations are investigated closer.

Sepinwall (2012, pp. 368–371) illustrates the role and some of the arguments of the broadcasters in commissioning TV series. The creator of *Breaking Bad* went on an odyssey: first he went to Sony, whose executive

“thought it was the single worst idea for a television series he had ever heard in his life, focusing on a 50 years old man, diagnosed with cancer, cooking crystal meth to earn money for his family, especially since the crystal-meth business would be a non-starter at the broadcast networks.”

HBO and TNT rejected the series, and Showtime was developing a similar series: *Weeds*. FX “didn’t want to become the anti-hero network”. AMC, writes Sepinwall (2012, p. 370),

“was already looking for the show that would follow *Mad Men*. After seeing mainly only period-piece scripts, and not wanting to become the period piece network, he [an executive at AMC] liked how contemporary *Breaking Bad* sounded, comparatively. He then suggested Gilligan should also direct it, leading it to become the most cinematographically daring show on television.”

Scholars discern enabling and constraining factors on creation and mediation at the broadcasters as well. Redvall (2013, pp. 196–197) points at the influences on the production and content of TV series of “mandate, management and money of particular institutions and industries.” Sperb (2017) follows Lotz (2014) and Havens and Lotz (2017), and deploys as the core distinction criterium of business models, the way viewers pay for the consumed products: “Pay-TV” and “Free-TV” which both have to be understood as ideal types. In the practice of TV content distribution elements of both business models are to an extent deployed simultaneously. The largest revenue stream then indicates which of the two (US), or three (Europe) business model types can be assigned to an organization or company active in the TV series industry. For example, Barra and Scaglioni (2015) draw a direct link between business models and audience targets of the producing or commissioning

organizations in the current Italian media landscape on the one hand, and characteristics and elements of the produced TV series' content on the other.

### **5.6.3. Public Service Broadcasting Organizations**

The social and cultural role of PSBs is of interest to Hesmondhalg (2012) and bears relevance to the subject of this investigation as well, because PSBs produce a substantial share of European original TV series. Many of the interviewees in the sample of the present study are or were commissioned or employed by PSBs. Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 137-146) summarizes the defining characteristics of public service broadcasting "as outlined by its advocates" (p. 137), like Brants and Sune (1992), Blumler (1992), and Tracey (1998): PSBs a) are accountable to the public through its political representatives; b) receive some form of public financing; c) invest (all) revenue in programming and administration; d) submit to regulation of content that exceeds the general restrictions on broadcasting (pertaining to advertising, violence, pornography) and includes considerations of balance, impartiality and minority interests; e) have educational tasks; f) service all national regions; g) encourage and satisfy the full taste spectrum in society; h) address the audience as citizens, instead of consumers; i) maintain the cultural diversity of the nation; j) assume (some) responsibility for the nation's political process and quality of public discourse.

Before presenting the evidence for enabling and constraining conditions of creation of TV series that are related to PSBs (in chapter 9.4), some light is shed on the position of the organizations in the respective sampled countries. Differences can be made out between the PSBs that reflect "very different political cultures" (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 138). The differences pertain to a) financing of the broadcasting system and the PSBs; b) state control of PSBs; c) relationship of PSBs to political institutions.

In the UK, consecutive governments in the 80s and 90s pushed deregulation and privatization in the media sector. The BBC and Channel 4 were not privatized, and the commercial companies objected to the PSBs adding advertising as a source of revenue. The first wave of deregulation under the Thatcher government affected ITV and the company moved away from 14 regional franchised stations towards monopoly control by one company (in 2004, ITV PLC). The BBC underwent waves of budget cuts. Political pressure by conservative and then labor governments led to the aversion of risk and criticism in reporting. Cabling was left to the private sector and its limited penetration offered an opportunity to British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB) to establish a virtual monopoly in satellite pay-TV. All the broadcasters are also active in the (co-)production of serial fiction. In addition, various international streaming services are available in the UK (Netflix, Amazon) and produce original content in the UK, and/or in collaboration with British creatives.

In Germany, a dual system was introduced with the launch of the commercial TV sector in 1984, whereby the "decentralized public service system remained intact" (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 144). After the unification of the country in 1990, weak



regulation of cross-media ownership enabled conglomerates to dominate commercial broadcasting and publishing. Hesmondhalg (2012, p. 144) sees the German public service channels consolidating their positions without excessively copying successful formats of private commercial TV. On the contrary, the private channels are in fact bound by a regulation promoting original programming and “showed the influence of public service” (Hesmondhalg, 2012, p. 144) in their program content. The PSBs produce serial fiction, with ZDF traditionally at the forefront. The main commercial channels RTL and SAT1 are also active in the production of TV series. In the realm of pay-TV, the usual suspects (international streaming services) are available, and Netflix produced its first original German series *Dark* in 2017. Another important player is Sky, a satellite pay-TV platform, which (co-)produces original series (*Babylon Berlin* is made in cooperation with ARD). Krauss (2018) investigates the industry discourse on (high-end) TV series in Germany. The author (2018, p. 51) infers that the complex characters of US high-end series are by several of his PSB interviewees not regarded as suitable for the German PSB audience. The author (p. 51, 56) detects TV-historical and production-cultural reasons, broadcasting path-dependencies, a low status of the format TV series, target audience (mainstream and old), time slot and programming constraints, that interfere with innovation of TV series and evoke a focus on traditional crime stories and melodramas. Nevertheless, in 2018, a ‘boom’ in German high-end TV series is made out, as in the second half of the year several co-produced and very expensive series are released on various platforms (Amazon Prime, Netflix, Sky, PSBs) and the production of several more was announced. In relative terms, the output remains rather modest in Europe’s biggest TV market.

In the Netherlands, until the mid-80s, the pillarized broadcasting landscape was dominated by ideology- and/or religion-based broadcasters that were (partly) financed by membership. Advertising income was collected centrally and redistributed to the broadcasters. The third revenue stream was state subsidy. National privately-owned ad-based TV was established in 1992 after competitive pressure by international broadcasters. Currently, the increased number of ideology/target audience/lifestyle-based broadcasters are incorporated in the national PSB (NPO) that operates three TV channels. In addition, eight large and seven smaller ad-based TV broadcasters (mixed and foreign ownership) are active.

Belgium consists of three language-based regions of which the Flemish and the French communities are large. Both language communities are served by dual broadcasting systems. The national Belgian PSB was broken up in 1978 into three independent sections subjected to their regional governments and diverging regional regulations. Advertising in PSB programs is allowed in Wallonia, but not in Flanders. The production of original content has a strong priority in the strategy of broadcasters in Belgium, which is not surprising in a country ridden with conflict between language-based communities. In both regions, the PSBs (the Flemish VRT, the French-speaking RTBF), as well as the largest private commercial channels (VTM in Flanders, RTL in Wallonia), are very active in the production of Belgian TV series,

of which some examples are internationally praised. Netflix produces Dutch-Flemish TV series.

Switzerland, a small TV market with four different language-based regions, established a dual system later than many of the other countries in the sample of this study. The PSB TV organizations in the two larger language regions (SRF, RTS) are discussed in this study and are owned by a private-law foundation SRG SSR, which is subject to a public service remit. Several attempts at nation-wide commercial TV in the 90s failed before 3plus established itself on the (German-speaking Swiss) market in 2006. Commercial channels from neighboring countries sell advertising for the Swiss market. Regarding original Swiss TV series, only the public service TV channels are engaged. Among them, the French-speaking RTS has the largest output in numbers of produced series. Various streaming services and their offer of serial fiction are available, and so is the satellite supplier Sky. The international streaming services offer less choice in Switzerland than in the big neighboring markets Germany, France and Italy. Netflix does not produce Swiss series but distributes the Swiss series *Der Bestatter*.

In Italy in the 1970s, a dual system of broadcasting was experimented with, and from 1980 onward, commercial TV was available nationwide. The PSB RAI produces original serial fiction for its main channels, and so does the main advertising-based competitor Mediaset. Netflix Italia as well as Sky Italia produce original Italian content.

In Denmark, the PSB Dansk Radio (DR) has become world famous for producing serial fiction. Redvall (2013, pp. 196–197) states that “series from DR are marked by their production in a public service television framework spending (...) resources on only a few high-profile series annually. (...). The current output (...) has to be interpreted in relation to the managerial ideas.” Redvall (2013, p. 16) sketches the origins of the successful strategy: “one of the changes at DR was (...) a new strategy of producing more mainstream ‘quality within genre’ - fare, combined with an ambition to copy work methods from the American television industry”. The dogmas formulated by DR translate into (broadly interpretable) criteria of what series ought to contain and how they must be produced. They also ‘prescribe’ the inclusion of societally relevant elements in the fiction produced for/by DR. Redvall (2013, p. 97) describes pitches for new TV series, by participants of the course in TV screenwriting (“the term”) at the National Film School of Denmark:

“The idea of double storytelling was foregrounded many times (...). [The assessors of DR] often commented on projects with an emphasis on their public service aspects (...). The social and ethical connotations are thus not only at stake in relation to drama series, but also (...) the comedy series were interpreted as dealing with big issues.”

Redvall (2013) states that the conviction that original TV series provide public value is an important argument in discussions about public service broadcasting and TV drama. The mandate of PSBs often includes “bringing a variety of national stories in the native language to the small screen” (2013, p. 39). In addition, an obligation of DR is to offer “what market-driven players are not providing” (Redvall, 2013, p. 41).

Next to the PSB DR, the advertising-based channel TV 2 is active in production of TV series. TV 2 was originally a state-owned channel that ought to compete with DR (see next section). It was turned into a government-owned public company in 2003 and broadcasts advertisements only between programs. HBO and Netflix (co-)produce TV series in Denmark. The commercial satellite channel TV 3 broadcasts from the UK into the Danish market and is exempt from national regulation.

International and Scandinavian streaming services are available throughout Scandinavia. In Norway (1988) and Sweden (1990), dual TV broadcasting systems have been established. The PSB NRK and TV 2 (the private advertising-based channel) produce original Norwegian TV series. In Sweden, original serial fiction is produced by order of the PSB SVT, as well as by the private advertising-based broadcasting group TV4. HBO Nordic and Netflix produce Swedish serial fiction. In addition, an upsurge in Scandinavian co-productions of TV series is observed, as Redvall (2013, p. 53) explains, “cultural similarities and a tradition of Nordic collaboration have been a great advantage for the production and distribution of series. (...). Only the crime series have been able to attract international financing” due to their audience and critical success, from, mainly, the German PSB ZDF.

#### **5.6.4. Advertising-Based TV**

Free-TV is a confusing term because the content provided by this type of broadcaster is not in fact free: the viewer pays with (potential) attention for advertising, and consumption of the advertised products. Thus, here, the term advertising-based TV (ad-based TV) is deployed instead. This means that the broadcasters’ main revenue stems from selling advertising slots (spots) and possibilities (product placement, sponsoring) to customers. In essence, the broadcaster sells the attention (time) of viewers to advertisers, but the viewer does not pay directly for the offered content. Napoli (2009) infers that the goal of ad-based networks is the buildup of (sustainable) audience attention. The (promise of) audience attention for advertising can subsequently be sold.

Ad-based TV is traditionally the most commonly deployed model in the US and is strongly present in Europe as well. The organizations function in a dual market where they market two types of goods: content as the product for (not paying) audiences and audience as the product for paying advertisers (Havens & Lotz, 2017). Havens and Lotz (2017) infer that a program offer interpreted as the product of ad-based broadcasters obscures the perception on the actual and relevant product: audience attention for advertisements. It follows that broadcasters strive for the largest, economically most viable audience. To achieve their goals, the broadcasters strike a balance between audiences’ and advertisers’ demands. Satisfaction of audience needs evokes larger audiences, which then (possibly) translates into higher advertising rates and thus revenues. A condition for this scenario to come into effect, however, is that the content that attracts the audience does not circumvent or contradict the advertisers’ targets (Havens & Lotz, 2017). The ad-based networks also began generating revenue by selling certain popular original

contents directly to viewers on various carriers (video tape, DVD, etc.), and, later, in addition by video on demand on web-based players.

The advertising-based business model is not confined to the network-type broadcaster but is also deployed by basic cable TV. Basic cable networks generate revenue from subscribers and offer syndicated as well as original programs interspersed with advertising. In addition, through the infrastructure of the basic cable networks, the subscribers can buy access to pay-cable: suppliers of advertising-free premium content. In a sense, basic cable represents a mixed form of the ideal types of ad-based and pay-TV.

The TV landscape in Europe varies by country, but the distinction into ad-based and pay-TV is valid. Ad-based TV is distributed by antenna, satellite, and – predominantly – by cable providers (often telecommunication companies). Basic cable packages vary in number of available channels, and for an additional fee special interest channels can be added. Furthermore, premium packages are available through the cable infrastructure. The PSBs deploy a third type of business model, since the revenues stem from some form of subsidizing, next to, in most countries, income from advertising. The viewers pay for the total offer of programs of PSBs through varying forms of taxation, licenses or fees, and by attention for advertising. PSBs sell hard copies of original content that is also available on web-based players to the national general public within a limited time frame.

Regarding the content of TV series in ad-based TV, the two central considerations have consequences: the appeal to the largest possible audience will in most cases lead to adapting content to opinions and tastes of the construct audience. Thus, TV series are produced that are perceived as satisfying the demands of high numbers of potential audience members. The coherence with advertising can, depending on interpretation, dictate and/or restrain content features, from plots and messages to characters, settings, costumes and props. Authors point at the strongly restraining influence of advertisers (cf. Fischer, 2014; Gray, 2008). Sandler (2013), for example, sketches the strong impact of product placement on the series *Modern Family*.

Pertaining to European ad-based broadcasters, Redvall (2013, p. 197) refers to a 2011 survey among screenwriters in Denmark, in which the ad-based broadcaster TV 2 emerges as constraining and volatile in its requirements of series. According to Krauss (2018), ad-based broadcasters in Germany did at first not notice the trend towards quality increase in serial fiction. At present, profit maximization constrains the production of expensive original series (Krauss, 2018, p. 53).

Sperb (2017) sums up the constraints on content of TV series at ad-based broadcasters: the tight control of topics and portrayals by the producing studio, the broadcasters, and the advertising clients; compliance with many varying (perceived) demands of the audience; compliance with the demands of advertisers and with regulatory requirements. Sperb (2017) infers that advertisers do not necessarily object to controversial or negative contents, but to associations with their products that might emerge in the minds of viewers. Dreher (2014) stipulates that TV series' storytelling in ad-based TV is also strongly restrained because (potential) viewers

must be able to enter the narrative anytime and long-running complex story arches are thus to be kept at a minimum.

In trade press investigations, constraining and enabling factors on the mediation of messages stemming from different types of producing and distributing organizations are often made out. TV writers Warren Leight (Kallas, 2014, pp. 39–40), Jenny Bicks (Kallas, 2014, p. 66), Eric Overmyer (Kallas, 2014, p. 96) describe the unwritten laws of (US-American) advertising-based network TV: the topical and character no-go areas include crimes among poor people, adulterous wives, and flawed female protagonists. Martin (2014, p. 29) states that showrunner Stephen Bochco sees the creation of a series as a state of war with the ad-based network. Lez Cooke confirms this (Creeber, 2007, p. 23). Kallas (2014, pp. 173–174) states that some of the series discussed by her interviewees would have been cancelled had they been broadcasted by networks. Kallas notes (with some apparent astonishment) that something as prosaic as a business model might invoke pay-TV to allow “for greater independence, and for more trust in the creative people and ultimately the audience” (2014, p. 176).

#### **5.6.5. Pay-TV**

The business model of pay-TV bases on first-order relations between suppliers and consumers. In this business model, the main revenue stems from viewers paying for content. Within this type, a distinction is made between direct pay versus subscription models of pay-cable/satellite/web-streaming TV. A further distinction can be made between offers that supply paid content for linear viewing according to program schedules, and video on demand. It follows, that the suppliers need to be able to offer content for which consumers are willing to pay, be it a single product or an archive of products (Havens & Lotz, 2017). Gormász (2015) infers that direct pay-TV suppliers face fewer topical restrictions than ad-based TV, because advertisers are left out of the equation. The challenge, however, consists of finding an audience willing to pay in a market with an abundance of offers. On the other hand, at subscription offerings, access to a package of products in the shape of a full program, or as access to archives, is sold to consumers for a periodic and/or a membership fee. The content restrictions are fewer than in ad-based TV, and the challenge consists of continuously renewing the product palette to keep the package sufficiently interesting for consumers to extend their subscriptions (Havens & Lotz, 2017).

The business model of pay-TV is also relevant in Europe. Suppliers offer packages as well as one-off viewings for fees. The paid content used to be made available by satellite transmission but relies at present predominantly upon the basic cable distributors (hardware and access to channels), and the internet. In Europe, we can also distinguish between offers that supply paid content for linear viewing (e.g., the standard premium package supplied under the name Sky) and video on demand (e.g., Sky Ticket). Transnational and globally active companies dominate the market to a larger extent (Sky, Canal+, Netflix, Amazon, iTunes), but supra-regional pay-TV suppliers like Cmore in Scandinavia are also active on the market.

Dreher (2014) states that creators, producers, and/or directors are given more leeway, more creative freedom by companies with this business model. Obviously, the constraints induced by advertising and ratings per single program play less of a role. The content of pay-TV networks is, due to the closed, non-public character, not under the jurisdiction of the national regulatory authority. Premium cable suppliers like Showtime, HBO exploit the freedom of regulatory restraints regarding nudity and sex, profanity, violence in their series to the maximum (Gormász, 2015). An orientation on economically viable niche audiences expands the band width of pay-TV series with topics that are commonly perceived in the industry as incompatible with the ('construct' of) mass audience (Gormász, 2015). The premium suppliers' considerations regarding the cultural value of TV series (that are in effect company reputation or brand considerations) evoke a range of characteristics of the produced series: 'auteur' status of creators; high production value and investments; titillating, provocative, emotion-laden or intellectually inspiring topics and characters; complex serial storytelling; challenges to viewers identification; unmoral portrayals; realism, experimentation, to name the ones most relevant for this study (Gormász, 2015; Kleibrink, 2014).

The production company and subscription-based cable network HBO (pay-TV) stands out with respect to the output of series that include what can be called societally relevant content (*The Wire*, *The Sopranos*, *Sex and the City*, *Big Little Lies*, *The Leftovers*, *Westworld*, *The Deuce*, *Game of Thrones*, *Veep*, *Generation Kill*, *Show Me a Hero*, and more). Substantial scholarly interest goes out to the company, its strategies, business model, production processes, management, etc. (cf. Edgerton & Jones, 2008b, 2008a; Leverette, Ott, & Buckley, 2008; Lotz & Haggins, 2008; McCabe & Akass, 2007, 2008a; Schlütz, 2016). Authors discuss the content of specific series, the disseminated messages, and find the reasons for the manifold inclusion of critical notions of (US) society in some (allegedly unique) characteristics of the company: the management of production processes, the lack of interference with the content of commissioned series, and the trust in talent (Allen, 2008; Edgerton, 2008; Lavery, 2008; Malach, 2008; McCabe & Akass, 2008b; Morreale, 2008; Newcombe, 2008; B. Rose, 2008; Schatz, 2008; Schlütz, 2016; Simon, 2008; Thorburn, 2008). Jensen (2017, p. 40) says:

"While HBO's motivation to grant Simon a large degree of creative freedom is rooted in economical rationales (self-promotion and profit), this creative freedom nonetheless gives Simon the chance he needs to tell stories that (...) all concentrate on the ills and appeals of the American city."

Attention goes out to absence of advertisers' influence on the (often controversial) content of HBO series (Kelso, 2008), to the internal culture at the company (Santo, 2008), and to its 'premium' brand (Nelson, 2007). Leverette (2008) investigates the competitive content strategy of HBO and states that controversial content is (also) a result of a strongly brand-based marketing strategy.

*The Sopranos* (HBO) serves as an example of a successful and financially highly rewarding appeal to what was initially conceived as a niche audience. The violence,

sex, shock value, social critique, novelty, complexity, realism, transgression of genres, and challenges to identification with protagonists form a toxic mixture for advertising-based broadcasting (cf., Martin 2014). HBO has a different business model and strategic considerations. The brand 'not TV' exemplifies the content strategy: content that is not available on, and far beyond, network TV. The marketing by HBO evokes connotations of exclusivity, elitist avant-gardism, and titillation. The substantial investment in the series was recouped from subscription fees. In addition, large profits were generated by syndication, but foremost by DVD sales.

In general, TV writers interviewed or portrayed in the trade press investigations by Kallas (2014), Sepinwall (2012) and Martin (2014) prefer working for (premium) cable TV over advertising-based (US-American) networks. At cable TV, respect for creative freedom is larger at managerial and executive levels, the policies and actions are more sensible, the control over content is less disruptive and more constructive, bureaucracy and dependence on advertisers is largely absent, and the targeted audience niches are open to innovative and controversial content in TV series. In addition, (premium) cable TV networks are regarded as well-funded, stable entities by the TV writers. TV writer Tom Fontana experienced the largest artistic freedom at HBO (Kallas, 2014, pp. 51–52) and points at the influences on content stemming from the different business models of financiers/distributors of the series *Borgia* he wrote and produced: Canal+ (pay-TV) insisted on more erotic scenes, ZDF (PSB) on fewer (Kallas, 2014, p. 54). Jenny Bicks professes that ratings nowadays do matter at cable TV companies, but are not decisive (Kallas, 2014, p. 68), and refers to cable TV station AMC where *Mad Men* drew a small audience but received a lot of critical acclaim, and calls it a beneficial trade-off for the company. TV writer Eric Overmyer praises the artistic freedom at cable TV and calls it the cause of the quality of certain series: "Network executives (...) want to simplify everything, and you often get the feeling the draft gets weaker and weaker" (Kallas, 2014, p. 95).

#### **5.6.6. Additional Influences**

The organization of the development and production of TV series in some ways resembles the production of film: people or companies team up to produce series and disperse to other projects after completion. This phenomenon is confirmed by most of the interviewed US-American TV writers in Kallas (2014). The production of TV series is less ephemeral than film production; series are by definition multi-episodic and might run for several seasons. In Kallas (2014), some of the writers mention long-lasting entities: the production companies they founded or joined. Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 136) observe that high-tech industries minimize costs by contracting third parties to fulfil the required tasks. Film and TV series production organizations compile creative staff and can replace 'dysfunctional' components without having to recreate the entire organization. "Creativity can (...) be outsourced. (...). The risk and cost of creativity thus often remains with the weakest link" (von Rimscha & Przybylski, 2012, p. 98).

Roberts (2010) investigates the often debated clash between creative and commercial considerations at important organizations in the production of TV drama in the UK, and sampled senior management, commissioning and developing staff (Roberts, 2010). The author found a high level of understanding for business considerations on the part of the creatives and vice versa. Conflicts were found, but not necessarily along the dividing line between creative and business roles. This finding of Roberts' (2010) is only supported for US premium cable networks (and, according to media reports, for Amazon and Netflix) in the reviewed literature.

Scholars investigate the influences on content exercised by the specific value chain and exploitation strategies. Backstein (2001) sees the sexual content in TV series of the US pay-cable channel Showtime as a result of the organization's strategy to 'out-sex' the direct competitor HBO. Jaramillo (2013) and A. Smith (2013) investigate the link between adaptations of strategy and the output of critical and controversial series at US (basic) cable network AMC. Dunne (2007) discusses the production of Quality TV, as newly also done at (basic) cable networks.

At the organizational level, aspects of origins, sources and suppliers of content at the input border of production companies also play a role in determining which kind of messages are incorporated. Scholars devote attention to the adaptation of foreign series (Garcia Avis, 2015), to remakes of cult series (Hills, 2013, 2013), and to adaptations of stories from other media into TV series (Jenkins, 2013).

Schlütz (2016) sees different production processes connected to Quality TV than to 'normal' series (the process is, in short, more open to a multitude of outside influences), and Scott (2013) describes how content is influenced by the fans of the series *Battlestar Galactica*.

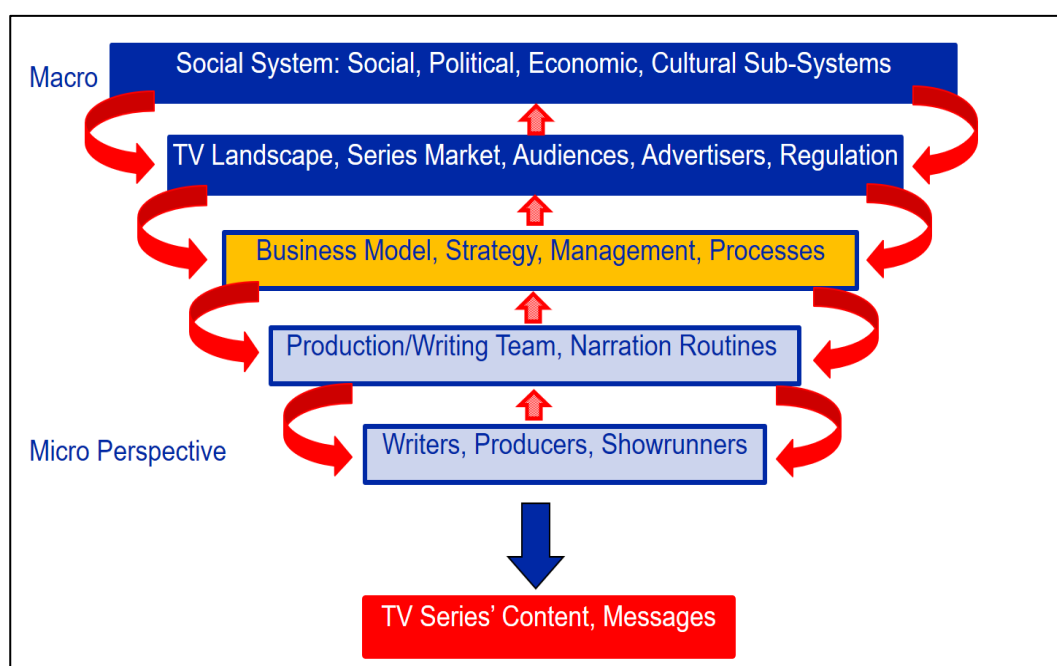
The fact that the cable networks are part of larger conglomerates is not mentioned in the trade press by the interviewed writers as the ownership of organizations seems to play no role in their eyes. Within the realm of TV series, the scientific material on effects of ownership, vertical integration, etc. is also rare.

### **5.6.7. Summary**

The findings in literature are summarized in the figure below.



Figure 4. The organization level influences on TV series' content



Source: Compiled by author, model based on Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 13)

## 5.7. The Routines Level Influences on TV Series

### 5.7.1. Conceptual Factors

Both introduced models recognize a “routines” level of influences on media content that “generates forces that have, over time, led to professional standardization of (...) production” (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8). Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 168) state that media routines do not develop randomly, but are responses to the needs of media organizations and workers in the typical situation of limited resources and unlimited potential raw material. Media routines are related to three domains: (1) organizations, (2) audiences, and (3) suppliers of content. Pertaining to organizations, the authors state that “decisions on media content are not only made at the whim of individuals (...). The occupational settings (...) limit their decisions” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 166). Practical considerations come into play during the production of content; work procedures are developed to cope with the task at hand: factors that can be placed at the “routines” level of influences.

### 5.7.2. Work by Teams

The second-lowest level, the routines level, consists of the immediate, enabling and constraining structures within which the series’ creators work. The script of a TV series is the size of an epic (multi-part) novel, whereas a film script is the size of a novella. The sheer work burden of writing multi-episodic TV series is so large that a team of writers and intense collaboration of a creative staff are required, domain (1) of Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 168). The inclusion of specific content in TV series

can be seen to (also) depend on the decision-making process within the creative team of a TV series. A key feature of US-American TV series is script composition by a close-knit collaborative effort of a team of writers, a practice known as the writer's room.

Phalen and Osellame (2012) devote attention to the writer's room and its influence on the content of series, and point at the manifold problems that occur within writers' rooms and exercise influence on content. The writers' room is a male-dominated culture the authors see as highly problematic. As an indicator of importance of the collective writing process, Phalen published in a book-length study in August 2017 on writing for TV and the writers' room. Also, Chow-White, Deveau, and Adams (2015) focus on the production team chemistry as an influence on content, and see constraints and agency in the production of *Battlestar Galactica* "as a site of critical cultural commentary and the politics of racial and gender representation in the series" (p. 1). Thereby, the creators' team, whilst pressurized from the outside, runs into (internal) difficulties and conflict about the moral and political nature of the stories. Henderson (2009) emphasizes the importance of the workings of the writers' room for TV series. Mann (2009) declares the 'author' principle (the influence of one main writer on content) a myth, and finds that series like *Lost* have to be regarded as a branded storytelling franchise, and as a product of a collective effort.

Redvall (2013, p. 189) investigates the production of Danish TV series and focuses on the "interpersonal and intangible aspects" of screenwriting, writers' rooms and collective creation. The author (2013, p. 188-191) finds close cooperation between writers, compares it to integrative collaborations and work processes of thought communities, and points out a remarkable small extent of competition in the work processes of the creators. She relates this absence to the small size of rooms without a "detailed hierarchy". She states that "the successful series from DR have been based on long-term writer-producer constellations, [and are] perceived as 'twin vision' by some producers. (...). The collaboration with producers seems crucial for writers with a need for supportive structures."

Redvall (2013, p. 191) sees head writers having not complete but "sufficient control" over series: the competences and input of many involved are incorporated. The so-called 'one vision' is not deployed as a creative dictatorship, but as collaborative processes that build on extensive preparatory work and communication to reach consensus on the one vision.

In the trade press research, Martin (2014), and Kallas (2014) describe many influences on the composition of the content of TV series, and thus on the inclusion of system-critical messages, stemming from writing teams and different forms of the cooperation in the writers' rooms (US) and, respectively, within the production team (Denmark). Kallas (2014, p. 177) stipulates that European producers, with the Danish at the forefront, have embraced this organizational form of the writers' room in the last decade as well. The author rejects the notion that "audiovisual storytelling can only result from the mind of single genius" (Kallas, 2014, p. 5), in favor of the conviction that TV series are the result of collaboration between many writers.

TV writer Janet Leahy explains the accuracy of socio-political comments in the series *Boston Legal* as a result of the investment in quality research by the entire team (Kallas, 2014, p. 87). The same is implied about the group of writers of *The Wire* by Martin (2014). Kallas (2014) infers that collaborative writing processes are instrumental for the success and quality of a series: the group process stimulates mutual criticism, invokes innovation and challenges preconceptions about content.

Although the writers' room is a collective effort, in the US it often has a strong hierarchical structure. The majority of interviewed writers, concludes Kallas (2014, p. 95), feels that series need a unique voice and that final rewrites by showrunners are indispensable. Thus, since the showrunner decides how the practical work process (the writers' room) functions, the influences exerted on the individual level seem to be outdoing influences stemming from practical procedures at the routines level. Collaborations of writers seem almost always hierarchically organized (writer Diana Son in Kallas, 2014, p. 117). The showrunner is the key decision maker in the creative process: it is his/her vision that prevails in the end. TV writer Warren Leight observes that team writers are not involved in final editing of an episode, only the main writer is (Kallas, 2014, p. 37). TV writer Tom Fontana states that, although it is not contractually fixed, as showrunner, he always has the final cut of an episode (Kallas, 2014, p. 59). Kallas (2014, p. 159) states that "hierarchy defines this world of synergy and collaboration and creative freedom," and lists the levels of hierarchy in the production of a series: executive producer, co-executive or supervising producer, producer, co-producer, executive story editor, story editor, staff writer. This does not contradict the influence on content attributed to writers: head writers are often also the executive producers, the showrunners.

### **5.7.3. Narration Routines**

Gatekeepers (TV series' decision makers) present content in order to meet audience needs and expectations; this entails domain (2) of Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 168). A genre or a type of series can be regarded as a set of rules by which a narrative is told and content is depicted, and constitutes a form of story production routine, placeable at the "routines" levels of the models of both Shoemaker and Reese (2014) and Hanitzsch et al. (2010). The domain (3) suppliers of content (e.g., acquisition of material for series) of Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 168) was discussed as an organization activity in the previous subchapter.

Scientific studies investigate the relation between content, specific messages and different genres, types and categories of series. Boyken (2014) discerns (new, additional) storytelling possibilities in the complex narratives of current high-end TV series. Danneil (2014) finds expanded room for the inclusion of messages in the transgressive extrapolation in the animated series *The Simpsons*. Fischer (2014) locates narrative space in (certain) situation comedies. Nesselhauf and Schleich (2014b) call Quality TV (see below) the narrative playing field of today, Ritzer (2014) sees the leeway for expression for authors increased in Quality TV (cf. Boyken, 2014; Danneil,

2014; Dressel, 2014; Fischer, 2014; Gärtner, 2014; Nesselhauf & Schleich, 2014b; Ritzer, 2014; Scheurer, 2014; Semeraro, 2014).

The types of series can be interpreted as formulas, organization principles, or narration routines of storytelling and mediation. In simple terms, the way a story is told can either enable or constrain the inclusion of, and elaboration on, specific messages. For example, the long, ongoing storylines common to the archetype 'serials' are more prone to the inclusion and, especially, repetition of (societally relevant or other) intentional messages, than the within-episode resolution of dilemmas and narrative twists in the archetype 'series' (Hammond, 2005; Kelleter, 2014; Mittell, 2015; Ndalianis, 2005; Schlütz, 2016). The dimension continuous 'serial' versus episodic 'series' is best regarded as a continuum: most TV series have characteristics of both archetypes to various degrees and are located between the two poles. Pertaining to the relation of content and audiences, Schlütz (2016) states that series potentially accommodate occasional, spontaneous and coincidental viewing, whilst serials require involved, dedicated, regular viewing. The latter is more prone to binge-watching.

Another form of narration routines is the genre of a series. Genres and transgression of traditional narrative boundaries are topics of scholarly analysis (Danneil, 2014; Mittell, 2015). Certain genres are in principle more 'open' to societally relevant messages than others. Marc (2008) sees *Carnivale* open to multiple messages exactly because the series does not comply with any genre rules. Williamson (2008) reasons in the same vein, with respect to conventions of sitcoms. Freedman (2005) finds that the horror and supernatural genres offer space for the treatment of everyday life anxieties.

Certain forms of episodic storytelling and narrative complexity in general facilitate the inclusion and elaboration of messages further (Kosnik, 2013; Lotz, 2013; Mittell, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2013; Scheurer, 2014; Schlütz, 2016). Within the realm of TV series' aesthetics, elements like visual style (including the suggestion of realism) can be deployed to underline intentional messages (Butler, 2005; Haggins, 2005; Schlütz, 2016).

#### **5.7.4. 'Quality TV' as Meta-Genre**

The term 'Quality TV' is, originally, on the one hand an audience-related term, and on the other hand a critics' label. Sperb (2017) follows Schlütz (2016) and states that the term refers to a meta-genre, a genre that encompasses various traditional genres (like e.g., western, crime, fantasy, supernatural) and has specific characteristics. In this study it is of importance that the criteria by which a series can be labelled Quality TV always include the enabling of treatments of controversial topics (Johnson, 2005; McCabe & Akass, 2007; Nesselhauf & Schleich, 2014a, 2014b; Schlütz, 2016), 'Controversial' topics by definition refer to perceived deviation from societal norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, etc. Schlütz (2016) investigates the phenomenon of Quality TV in great depth and points at the inclusion of relevant issues. Feuer (2007) discusses the treatment of women's rights in (HBO) Quality TV.

Martens (2014) investigates the progressive narrative strategies of Quality TV and the room these offer for messages. Dressel (2014) investigates the mediated reflections on drugs in *The Sopranos*. Semeraro (2014) sees strong criticism of the US society in *The Following*. Fischer (2014) investigates Quality TV sitcoms and locates room for taboo breaking and non-conformity in these series.

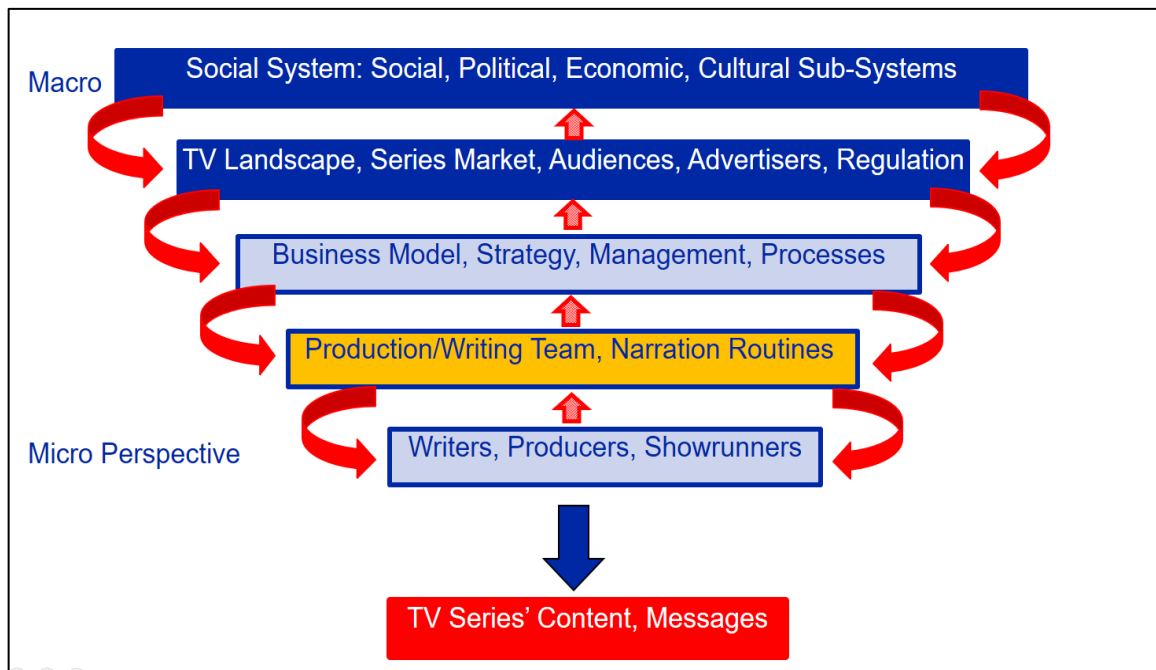
Thompson (in his work from 1996) praises the cultural value of several 80s series and formulates twelve key characteristics of Quality TV. The marketing of the series emphasizes the distance to regular (i.e. normal, classical, standard) TV. Reputable artists from outside the TV industry and a large cast are involved in the series: A blue-chip audience is attracted to the series. Conflicts with the broadcaster arose in the development of the series. The characters (and the series) have a memory. Genre boundaries are transgressed and a new genre is created. The series is literary and writers-based. The series is self-referential, cross-cultural and -media references are integrated. The subject matter is controversial and realistic. The series receives critical acclaim and awards. At the time of Thompson's writing not many series would match these criteria, and the term referred in practice more to a realistic and cinematic visual style uncommon on TV, and (for critics) to high-brow TV series (Nesselhauf & Schleich, 2014b). HBO began marketing and broadcasting original series by the mid-90s, and the understanding of Quality TV then became what it is to this day (McCabe & Akass, 2008c).

Schlütz (2016, p. 174) offers an updated and applicable list of categories to distinct Quality TV from non-Quality TV. Within the framework of this study the distinction is of no importance, but certain characteristics of Quality TV series that enable creativity and inclusion of messages are relevant. Complex series are open to societally relevant messages. Realism, controversial topics, multi-dimensional characters and authenticity are intertwined with societally relevant content and messages. On the reception side, Quality TV targets a specific, competent audience that consumes the series actively, possibly enhancing the effects of messages.

### **5.7.5. Summary**

The findings in literature are summarized in the figure below.

Figure 5. The routines level influences on TV series' content



Source: Compiled by author, model based on Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 13)

## 5.8. The Individual Level of Influences on TV Series

### 5.8.1. Conceptual Factors

The influences on composition of content, hence on the inclusion of societal relevant messages, can be placed on the level of the individual media producers, communicators, journalists, or, in this study, the creator(s) of TV series'. The influences stem from "personal and professional backgrounds and orientations, as well as from their specific roles and occupational characteristics within the (...) organization" (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8). The conceptual level of individuals (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 209) consists of four factors pertaining to individual communicators: (1) personal and demographic characteristics, backgrounds and experiences (e.g. gender, education, ethnicity, sexual orientation); (2) current attitudes, values, and beliefs; (3) professional roles, experiences, background, and ethics; (4) relative power within the organization. Personal background (1) logically precedes and exercises influence on, (2) personal attitudes, values, beliefs, and (3) professional roles, experiences, backgrounds, and ethics. Factors (2) and (3) influence each other mutually and combine to influence factor (4) power within the organization. The influences on media content at the individual level are thus shaped by characteristics, backgrounds, experiences, attitudes, values, beliefs, roles, ethics and power of the communicators.

Factor (1) the gender, education, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. does at times play a role in the reviewed trade press publications. More attention is devoted in the literature to the other factors, (2) personal attitudes, but mainly to factors, (3)

professional roles and opinions, and (4) power in the organization. Hanitzsch (2009, p. 154) regards investigation of the perception of influences on individual gatekeeping in journalism unsatisfactory. In TV series production, however, individual dispositions, roles and power of the creators of TV series are subjects of investigation.

### 5.8.2. Writers, Producers, Showrunners

At the lowest level of influences in Figure 6, individual dispositions of series' creators are subject of industry (trade) press investigation and receive scholarly attention. Widespread affirmation can be found for the central role of writers in the creation of TV series. Head writers of acclaimed series are at times regarded as artists, as stars, and thus their personal experiences, attitudes, beliefs (factor (2) (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 209), and their professional roles, background, career, roles, dispositions and power (factors (3) and (4), Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 209) are of interest.

Ethridge (2008) discusses the highly moralistic and socio-politically critical notions disseminated by *The Wire*, and sees the showrunner David Simon as the dominant force behind the criticism. The central position and strong influence on content of the main writer is found by Pearson (2005) and Messenger Davies (2007). Munt (2006) investigates the series *Six Feet Under*, and states: "HBO contracted Alan Ball to be 'the auteur' for their proposed series *Six Feet Under*. The concept was from the start to be signaled by an industrial context of artistic creativity, and visionary cinematic authorship." Klein (2011) sees an educational role for TV fiction in the conscientious treatment of topics like crimes against children, immigration and disability. The author describes the dilemma that producers face providing 'entertainment' whilst trying to tackle societally relevant topics, thereby implying that producers are the decisive force in the creation of the discussed product. In a European context, Redvall (2009) analyzes scriptwriting and the central position of writers in the production of, in this case, critically acclaimed and internationally successful Danish TV series. Sarikakis, Krug, and Rodriguez-Amat (2017) state that fans perceive sole creators of TV series that own the rights, in this case of *Game of Thrones*.

Redvall (2013, p. 187) states: "DR fiction [goes] with original ideas of writers. This strategy seems to establish a strong sense of ownership (...) with the particular writer, but (...) also calls for substantial time to develop an arena for a series." She (2013, pp. 189–191) acknowledges the adoption by DR of work methods (including the principle of a "personal authorial signature") from the US TV series industry, but "the writer with one vision in the DR Fiction framework is much more of a head writer than an executive producer." This is part of the concept of the PSB, says Redvall (2013, p. 103): "the concept (...) singles out the head writer as the one person with the vision for what is to be produced from start to finish."

The showrunner is a function combining the tasks of head writer and executive producer in one, a constellation that establishes omnipotence over a TV series. Jensen

(2017) treats the concept of the showrunner's complete dominance over a TV series with critical distance (as a marketing ploy by broadcasters), but does confirm a large influence on the topics, general outline and tonality of several series by *The Wire's* showrunner David Simon.

Redvall (2013, p. 107) states:

"The European way of producing drama series has traditionally been based on an individual writer working on his/her script with (...) editors commenting later in the process rather than having writers' rooms creating material during production under the supervision of a showrunner."

The showrunner is thus "not common" in Europe, but "is gaining more ground" (Redvall, 2013, p. 106). The BBC introduced the principle for *Doctor Who* and American showrunners have been hired for prestigious European productions. Some attention goes out to other roles in production. Redvall (2013, pp. 60–61) demonstrates convincingly the influence of developers and fiction department heads.

Martin (2014, p. 8) assigns David Chase, head writer of *The Sopranos* "god-like powers over an ever-expanding universe." Martin (2014, p. 125) attributes the extraordinary multitude of system-critical messages in the series *The Wire* to the journalistic background and sensibilities of head writer David Simon and to co-writer Ed Burns, who both identify with "the victims of capitalism." Simon confessed in memos to HBO what the essential aims of the series were:

"Among its targets (...) were the War on Drugs, the educational policy (...), and the influence of (...) money in America's political system, of statistics in its police departments, and of Pulitzer prizes at its newspapers. The big fish though, was nothing less than a capitalist system that Burns and Simon had begun to see as fundamentally doomed" (Martin, 2014, p. 135).

Martin (2014, p. 6) names *Hill Street Blues* as a series in which Stephen Bochco, the showrunner, time and time again intentionally reflects upon social problems.

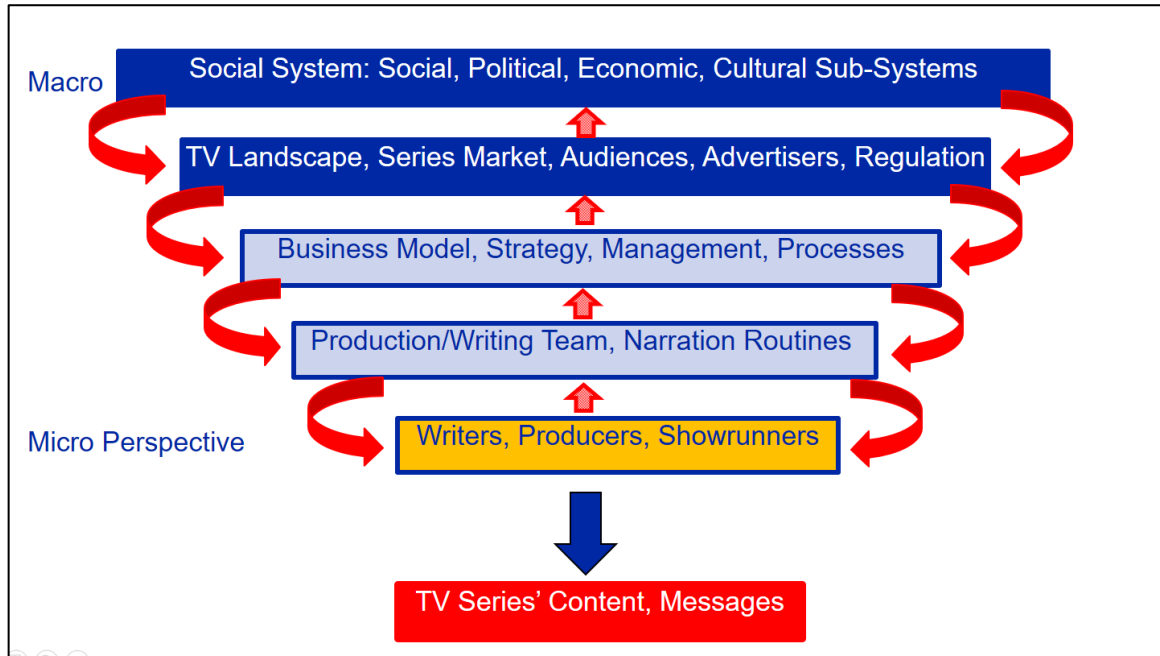
Kallas (2014) interviewed thirteen US American writers (including head writers and showrunners) of TV series and renders ample examples of the central position and strong influence of the main writer on content. TV writer Terence Winter points at the quality in today's TV as a result of the creative dominance of writers and contrasts this to cinema (Kallas, 2014, p. 11). TV writer Janet Leahy emphasizes the importance of having one single voice in a series (Kallas, 2014, p. 88). Kallas (2014) infers that many TV writers lament the difficult relationship of writers with directors in cinema and names this as a strong reason to stay in TV; the presence of the (head) writer on the set is a key factor behind the artistic, critical and/or commercial success of American TV series. TV writer Terence Winter thinks that rewrites by showrunners are preferable to rewrites by directors. This is because showrunners are foremost writers as well (Kallas, 2014, p. 21). In the trade press, some attention is dedicated to influences of other roles (than head writers and showrunners), like CEOs and program heads.



### 5.8.3. Summary

The findings in literature are summarized in the figure below.

Figure 6. The individual level influences on TV series' content



Source: Compiled by author, model based on Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 13)

## 5.9. Overview: Influences on Content of TV Series

### Social system level influences on content of TV series

- Evidence spurious
- Political subsystems → constraints of content
- Reflection of socio-political and -cultural climate, Zeitgeist in TV series

### Social institution level influences on content of TV series

- Large changes in TV landscape and TV series market
- Proliferation of suppliers, channels, products → enable content
- Audience fragmentation
- Pressure on traditional broadcasters (market shares, revenues) → constraining of production
- Surge of (new global) players and increased importance of TV series → more content (variation), intensified competition

### Organization level influences on content of TV series

- Organization strategies, policies, mandates, management, audience targeting and advertisers → constrain creation and mediation
- Influence of business model is large: PSB, ad-based TV and pay-TV
- TV series with relevant content → pay-TV in US, PSBs in Europe
- Ad-based TV audience strategy → constraints

- Fewer restrictions in pay-TV, but profit orientation → constraints?

#### **Routines level influences on content of TV series**

- Large work burden requires creative teams → constrains influence of individual creators
- The writer's room is production process in the US
- Procedures, atmosphere and hierarchy shape decision-making on content and messages
- Serials, 'Quality TV', transgressive genres enable societally relevant messages

#### **Individual level influences on content of TV series**

- Individual influences on TV series most prominent in public discourse
- Writers, producers, showrunners constrained by more macro factors
- But individuals carry out composition, incl. any messages
- Creators' dispositions, attitudes, opinions, hierarchical positions, roles and power → influence content.
- Writers accredited with most direct influence on content of TV series.
- Showrunner (writer/producer) → individual function with largest influence
- In Denmark developers → influential individuals

### **5.10. Influences on Content: Research Goals**

Societally relevant content as a success factor of TV series is the subject of the study at hand. Before tackling this subject, the constraining and enabling conditions for the content of TV series needs to be investigated. In the literature review presented in this chapter, a research gap emerges pertaining to the influences on European TV series. Many of the studies are assignable to the humanities and to operational theory as practiced in trade press investigations. The differences in output of TV series in European countries evokes inspection of the creation of TV series across national production cultures and media landscapes, in addition to the inspection of the influences of individuals, functions, production teams, and broadcasters' business models as the reviewed literature indicates. The European (and Canadian) environment and determinants of the creation and content of TV series might diverge strongly among each other and from the US.

To fill the research gap, in the empirical part of this study that is rooted in communication science, the focus lies on influences on the content of TV series as mentioned by European and Canadian creators and experts. Obviously, the question of the relative strength of the emerging influences is then also of interest. The results are presented in chapter 9. In the following chapter, the attention first goes out to the content that scholars deem societally relevant elements of TV series.

## 6. Societally Relevant Content of TV Series

After deliberating on the manifold influences on content of TV series as discerned by researchers, this chapter discusses one specific outcome of constellations of influences, of constraining and enabling factors: societally relevant content of TV series. In the first subchapter, I sketch the understanding of societal relevance in the present study. The other subchapters focus on portrayals by stereotypes, realism, depictions of the main social segregators, politics and controversial topics. In the last subchapters I offer an overview, discuss the research gap and the aims I pursue in the empirical investigation.

### 6.1. 'Societal Relevance'

Societal relevance is often discussed in the realm of media. The term can pertain to the relevance of media as the fourth estate, with its watchdog and custodian roles. It can also be a criterion in assessments of the quality of entire media systems and markets, or of the performance regarding content output and audience reach of individual media outlets, pertaining to, e.g. the funding of public service broadcasters, or the subsidizing of private radio stations. In addition, individual media products, programs, articles, contributions, etc. can be assessed along requirements of societal relevance. Societal relevance can also be deployed to distinguish between media content formats, i.e. information, infotainment and entertainment, whereby the former is societally relevant, and the latter two less so, offering lobbyists and pressure groups the pretext, to pose questions such as, e.g.: why do public service broadcasters have the mandate to air entertainment programs?

In this study, the focus is on societally relevant content and messages. The meaning of communicated messages is eventually constructed by recipients, as Stuart Hall convincingly formulates in the encoding/decoding model from 1973. The premise of the study at hand is the notion that communicators encode messages in such a way that their preferred interpretation has the highest chance to be adopted by receivers.

Regarding messages in TV series (and media in general), one could assume that every depicted and audible element is part of the symbolic environment (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) and thus transports meaning. This is the widest interpretation of societal relevance, where everything is (also) political, thus everything is societally relevant. As an example, a character in an audio-visual work of fiction can be wordlessly driving a car (in an establishing scene, for example). This communicates something to viewers. It can be decoded as an attractive activity to copy for recipients. The omnipresence of the product placement of cars in TV and cinema fiction confirms the assumption of the preferred meaning (car = good, necessary and/or fun) often being received by viewers. However, recipients can also choose to ignore the car, not care about it, or read it differently as promoting the construction of additional highways, or interpret it adversely as propagandizing ecological destruction. In the same vein, a man and a woman kissing can be indicating romance,

lust, joy, etc. and the intention of the encoder is to evoke emotions, sympathy, and identification. It can further be understood as promoting heterosexual relations at the expense of other kinds of relations, or as solidifying patriarchal society, or just as promotion for Valentine's Day sales. The wide understanding of societal relevance in TV series seems too all-embracing to be investigated within the framework of any single study.

On the other end of the spectrum, Eilders and Nitsch (2015b) analyze and systemize series broadcasted on German TV. To these authors, societal relevance of TV fiction consists of several clearly defined and measurable indicators of the extent of realism and political content.

In this study, the interpretation of societal relevance with respect to the introduced studies in this section is between the two extremes and is based on themes listed and compiled by Shoemaker and Reese (2014) and Creeber (2007). The latter lists issues that are not only discussed in information media, but also in audio-visual fiction: class, gender, ethnicity, national identity, age, politics, sexuality, environment, education, employment, psychology, health, public vs. personal issues, position vs. valence issues, social stratification and disorganization, violence, crime and punishment, wealth and poverty, war and peace. Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 39-53), on the other hand, systematize the media topics stronger and distinguish the mediation of politics, geography, crime and violence (including war, terrorism, etc.). In addition, pertaining to the portrayal of people, the themes of ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual identity are also distinguished as salient subjects of questionable mediation.

The volume and quality of the studies on the topics vary strongly; on some of these no substantial material emerged regarding TV series. The discussion of societal relevance is predominantly confined to scientific studies<sup>7</sup>, and begins with the concept of stereotypes to continue with the review of studies on the portrayal (by stereotypes), referring to the most salient topics of gender, ethnicity and class. In addition, research on the treatment of sexuality and a selection of controversial topics in TV fiction is presented.

## **6.2. Portrayal by Stereotypes**

Media content is a social construction, and is "problematic": it competes with other subjective social realities, and in its use, media draw heavily on stereotypes (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, pp. 39–63). As stated in the previous section, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) see the media as (un-) willingly misrepresenting social reality by disseminating (distorted and distorting) stereotypes. Misrepresentation of social reality is inherently societally relevant.

The concept of stereotypes is strongly linked to the concept of 'the Other' or 'Othering.' The Other can be defined as

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<sup>7</sup> Besides several notions of Martin (2014) and Sepinwall (2012), trade press interviews and portraits do not cover societal relevance.

“a person or group of people who are perceived to be different in some fundamental way from oneself and the group one perceives one belongs to. Otherness refers to defining characteristics of the Other, and othering is the process whereby otherness is mobilized to produce in- and outgroups within society and to justify the way in which Others are treated. (...) Others are often defined by race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality” (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013).

Thus, the Other is created in order to define oneself or the social group(s) one belongs to in relation to the Other. Besides being constructed to create self-identity, the Other can also be generated within and/or between communities. In the latter case, group cohesion is created, while in the former, power hierarchies (masters and slaves, men and women) are established (Kruger, 2013). Often, the Other is perceived to be not only different from the self or a dominant group of society but also inferior to it.

The traits of the Other are typically defined in simplified, generalized ways. Pendry (2007, 114-116, 143) defines stereotypes from a psychologists' frame of reference as cognitive structures that consist of knowledge, convictions, and expectations regarding social groups. Once people are assigned to certain social categories, the intertwined stereotypical information can color judgements and opinions to an alarming degree. Within the context of this study, it is of importance that stereotyping is common in media (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 39-53). Stereotypical portrayals in the media can, by way of priming and framing, activate recipients' beliefs, attitudes, biases, prejudices, etc. (Schemer, 2013).

The behaviorist Merskin (2011, p. 32) sees our knowledge organized in different mental schemata that form a cognitive structure. These are blueprints that efficiently inform people on commonalities and differences with other people, places and things. Cognitive schemata equal stereotypes. Whenever individuals stereotype other individuals, they gather easily grasped characteristics and reduce the other individual's whole being to such basic traits. Stereotypes provide human beings with necessary support in everyday life, because they enable the successful processing of challenges posed by situations, people and places without having to assess these anew each time. Human beings draw on already existing knowledge to enable judgments. Thus, based on shared elements, humans create cognitive groups, placing everyone similar in the in-group and assigning everyone different to the out-group. This division into in-group and out-group may itself be flawed since, according to Shoemaker and Reese, “there may be as much variance within out-groups (and within in-groups) as between in- and out-groups” (2014, p. 47).

Stereotypes nevertheless persist and favor the status quo, and their adaption is almost impossible. Even in cases where individuals detect a clearly disingenuous stereotype, they still maintain it for lack of motivation or skills to change the fundamental elements of the stereotype.

Behm-Morawitz and Ta (2011/2011) consider the media as important players in socializing individuals and establishing and maintaining race-attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. According to Behm-Morawitz and Ta (2011, p. 154), the media can

contribute to stereotyping in three different ways: they can (1) activate existing stereotypes, (2) create stereotypes and (3) debunk stereotypes. Stuart Hall writes: "The media are not only a powerful source of ideas about race. They are also one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed, and elaborated" (Dines & Humez, 1994/2011, pp. 90–91).

The TV critic Sepinwall sees the portrayal in current series entailing more diversity:

"There are now more shows with complex female leads, prominent characters of color, and other types of characters the medium previously had no interest in putting at the center of a show, like Tambor's character on *Transparent*, or the featured characters in *Orange Is the New Black* [that span] many different ethnicities, sexualities and gender identities. [The producers] (...) had to cast largely unknown actresses because how many good opportunities were there for most of them prior to its existence?" (Sepinwall, 2012, p. 437)

In conclusion, one can say that, although effects and influences are a continuously debated subject, and the classical media types might be losing their supposed influence, enough evidence is presented to take the portrayal in a format (TV series) that is increasingly produced and consumed very seriously. In the following sections, research on the portrayals of people, groups and phenomena in society is discussed, whereby the focus is on topical portrayals and on the extent of distortion.

### **6.3. Realism as Content Element and Attribute**

Realism seems a hard to define concept, and many different interpretations are deployed. Eilders and Nitzsch (2015b) investigate the degree of realism in TV series and films based on the presence of the content elements real-existing characters, places, themes, and on the storytelling time-lapse. Fiske (1987) sees the term as a sketchy conception that includes different articulations. Jordan (1981, p. 28) defines realism as social realism: television content is realistic when characters' lives are presented as narrations of personal events. Recipients must be able to recognize the locations as representing everyday life. The audience ought to be able to identify with the characters and to locate the characters' social position, i.e. class or milieu. The show should further be set in the present and the series must make matters comprehensible by keeping all links and relationships between elements in the content clear and logical. Thus, Fiske stipulates (1987) that everything has a purpose, regardless of whether it is decoration, acting or dialogue; they follow the basic laws on cause and effect. It follows that this interpretation of realism (which is adopted in the present study) allows fictional content to be (to an extent) realistic. Within their fictional natural laws and their abilities, the story follows logic principles such as cause and effect.

Next to content elements, scholars discern attributes of TV series as realistic. Hudelet (2018, p. 78) discusses *The Wire* and finds that “‘realism’ also applies to the aesthetics of the show, implying a lack of embellishment, the reliance on linear time, the refusal of non-diegetic music or explanatory voiceover, and the presence of many ‘effects of reality’.” Redvall (2013, p. 43) cites work by Agger from 2005 as she states that the “realist tradition is the strongest in the history” of Danish TV drama. The key features are rendering storytelling strategies invisible, offering continuous motivation for the actions and deploying continuity editing. In addition, “a focus on the recognizable with a sense for detail, (...) a notion of time that mirrors time in ordinary life, and an ‘everyday experience structure’ at the core” are features. She lists reasons for the spread of realism in the productions of in particular PSBs: the mandate includes “representing national life and current conflicts.” In addition, budget limitations evoke topical stories in “real and natural settings.” Pertaining to topicality and realism, Redvall cites writings from 2012 of the DR head of fiction Reich who describes “double storytelling as crucial to creating series, which can stir debate, mirror relevant issue of our times and create insights into different values, cultures and ways of living” (Redvall, 2013, p. 70).

## **6.4. The Portrayal of Gender**

### **6.4.1. Portrayals of Women on TV**

A very salient topic in studies on audiovisual representations is the (distorted) portrayal of women. Scholars detect a large influence on society, since the (former) mass media are the place where norms are negotiated, established and popularized. In addition, mass media are part of the fora in which gender and sexual norms, values, and attitudes are negotiated and disseminated (Strube, 2009, 2015). In the same vein, Kenneth and Coltrane (1996) adhere to the cultivation theory and consider the portrayal of gender on television to impact the perception of gender images within society, whereby high levels of television viewing are associated with more stereotypical gender images.

The portrayal of women on TV has been scrutinized for more than half of a century. Dominick (1979) summarizes and states that females were underrepresented in network programs and shown in stereotyped roles. Dominick (1979) devised a long-term trend analysis of TV programs and characters in US primetime television from 1953 to 1977. Elucidating the visibility of females, women constituted a minority of all roles and were more often assigned the less prestigious comedy roles than men. Dominick (1979) finds that the gendered distribution of occupations in primetime TV fiction has no bearing in real-life. Elasmár, Hasegawa, and Brain (1999) find in a study review that women are under-represented in primetime television, are more often occupied in lower status professions, and are portrayed as more focused on domestic issues than men. There is a small but continuous increase of female characters in television programs over the years before 2000. Elasmár et al.

(1999, pp. 23–24) relate this increase to changes in society and the increasing status of women in the labor force. This in turn is mirrored in the hiring practices in the TV business which leads to quantifiable changes in the depiction of women on television, a conclusion that complements Dominick's findings (1979).

Elasmar et al. (1999) then conducted a content analysis of the depiction of women in US primetime TV programs of the 1992-1993 season. The researchers investigated the dimensions' success, power, occupation, presence and prominence, as well as the physical aspects of the portrayed characters. The results show that women, compared to the 70s-80s studies they reviewed, were less likely to a) be married, b) be housewives, c) be caring for children, d) be involved in crime and e) be in a romantic relationship. Women were, however, more likely to a) be playing minor roles, b) have dark hair and to c) be under the age of 50 (Elasmar et al., 1999, p. 20). The findings support the (preposterous) association of blond hair with attractiveness and success in the representation of women and demonstrate a severe underrepresentation of non-Caucasian ethnicities among the female characters.

Kenneth and Coltrane (1996) infer that TV advertising mediates fixed gender characteristics. Female characters tend to be passive, emotional and dependent. Male characters, on the other hand, tend to be successful, powerful and unemotional. Furthermore, men play more diverse and multi-layered characters. Despite steps forward, traditional depictions of women still prevail.

It goes without saying that the depiction of men is of interest as well. The fact that a review of studies on this sub-topic would incorporate all depictions in TV series says it all. The default mode of any topical analysis of portrayals on TV is that it concerns men.

#### **6.4.2. Portrayals of Women: Feminist Perspectives**

Scholars deploy feminist theories and approaches on the portrayal of women in TV (fiction). Kim (2001, p. 321) acknowledges that strong female characters have been present in American TV almost since its inception. Especially daytime dramas, e.g., soap operas, have always targeted female audiences and thus (also) focus on women's perspectives and experiences (Kim, 2001, pp. 322–323). Women on TV have, for a long time, been an identification reference frame for female viewers. Yet, the screen presentation of strong female characters cannot be mistaken for feminist portrayals, given that the depicted women are often carefully managed, controlled, restrained and punished. Although, according to the author, some declare the feminist struggle as completed, Kim (2001) remains critical and rejects certain portrayals of women, such as, for example, self-objectifying women (2001, p. 332). Usually, US and European TV portrays western white middle-class women. Historically these are depicted as the object of pitifulness and as the core producer of families (Barnes, 2007, p. 58).

The patriarchal system is most tangible in displays of the high personal and emotional costs of being a working woman (White, 2011, p. 46). Working females exemplify the extreme demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century employment. Like their male



counterparts, they are not able to have functional family lives or successful relationships. Originally these social psychological problems pertained to men as well, but, in combination with troublesome childcare, they morphed into female issues (White, 2011, pp. 49–50). McRobbie (2012, 2009, p. 79) acknowledges those on-screen tendencies and adds that even if women are allowed to ‘enjoy’ the employed status, the depiction does not permit them to really engage with their occupation. Employed female characters must keep a visible vulnerability and fragility to be desirable to men.

A systemization of stereotypical working women roles that is relevant to this day stems from Kanter (2010). The first dominant representation is ‘the corporate wife’ who is commonly married to a manager or an executive of the firm and is an instrument of diplomacy and enhancement of the husband’s image (Kanter, 2010, p. 121). The second representation is the secretary, or ‘the office wife.’ She has the same derivational status as her male boss, but has many tedious duties, like paperwork and alerting her boss to social obligations. In addition, the personal loyalty of the secretary requires fronting for her boss in negative situations (Kanter, 2010, p. 82). The “token high-level woman” represents all women that are surrounded by males, usually managers or executives. She is generally depicted as representing the viewpoint of women (Kanter, 2010, p. 215) and can be the mother figure, an emotional specialist and caretaker, the seductress figure, a sexual object at disposal to the men, or the pet figure, a mascot in the males’ team with unexpected and undervalued competences (Kanter, 2010, p. 235). The fourth stereotypical representation is ‘the iron maiden,’ who is branded as a feminist and is suspiciously regarded by the males. She is narratively prohibited from engaging with sympathetic male colleagues, because she demands equal treatment (Kanter, 2010, p. 236). Some types (mixed forms of the four archetypes) have been added since the 80s, but many roles of working females still fit the described molds in fiction.

### **6.4.3. Portrayals of Women in TV Series: Case Studies**

In the last decades, several TV series have been the focus of research because of their portrayal of women. Very prominent among these investigated series are *Sex and The City*, *Girls*, and, to a lesser extent, *Mad Men*.

The very successful premium cable series, *Sex and the City* evoked, due to the – at the time perceived as exceptional – portrayal of women, an abundance of positive reactions, but also quite some negative criticism. The series also became the subject of analyses and a large share of the debate evolved around the extent and content of post feminism in the series.

The women-centered romantic comedy incorporates several ground-breaking elements: four independent female main protagonists form a clique and engage in explicit socio-psychological and sexual discourses (Arthurs, 2003, p. 83). The four main characters are highly successful career women in their mid-thirties to early forties who are inseparable confidants. The women’s independence and freedom are depicted as a reward for their success. They are depicted as leading a glamorous

lifestyle, whilst moving in exclusive circles in Manhattan (Richards, 2010, pp. 147–148, 2010). The women are financially independent and do not rely on men, a very uncommon representation for an entire principal cast in the early 2000s. “They are the post-feminist, postmodern version of femininity, where economic, intellectual and sexual liberation has been achieved, thus allowing them to engage in glamorous consumption of men and clothes” (Brunsdon, 1997/2006, pp. 85–86). Even though actual work is rarely depicted, they have limitless funds and countless hours available to discuss their emotional and sexual lives (White, 2011, p. 45). Anyan (2015, pp. 84–85) hits a more positive tone when confirming *Sex and the City* as postfeminist, based on the portrayal of the friendship between Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha (the four main characters). Lorie (2011) is also not only negative but rather finds positive messages in the gender reversal in the series.

Modleski (1991, p. 14) sees the 90s feminism as „feminism without women.“ Femininity is no longer seen as an essentially sexist concept, consumption leads to empowerment of women, and freedom is confined to a materialistic freedom of choice. A summary of elements of post feminism reads like the content description of the seasons of *Sex and the City*.

The TV critics are not silent about the series either. Gold (2010), in an online newspaper article, ridicules the series and seems to speak for what scholars find. She does not see *Sex and the City* as a feminist text: “Sex and the City is to feminism what sugar is to dental care.” The main character is a journalist who never manages to formulate an answer to her own questions: “the worst journalist in the history of the world.” Gold (2010) sees a penalty of working and/or successful women. The series punishes the character Samantha, who gets breast cancer. At the same time, the juxtaposed traditional character Charlotte marries into wealth, leaves her job and moves into a mansion.

Nussbaum (2013) sees the four women as symbolic figures. She distinguishes three overlapping continuums in which the characters can be positioned. One continuum is emotional: Carrie and Charlotte are romantics; Miranda and Samantha are cynics. The second is ideological: Miranda and Carrie are second-wave feminists, who believed in egalitarianism; Charlotte and Samantha were third-wave feminists, focused on exploiting the power of femininity, from opposing angles. The third continuum is sexual: Miranda and Charlotte are prudes, Samantha and Carrie are libertines. It follows that many socio-cultural/political labels may apply to the series. This grab-bag of opinions and attitudes may well explain some of the success of the series. While the series has been criticized by feminists because of the four women’s search for romance, indicating their pseudo-independence (Adams, 2012), the show deserves credit for breaking many taboos around sexual issues (Freeman, 2013). The series is a frontrunner of the change in the portrayal of women and women’s friendships.

Several years later, *Girls* portrays women in their twenties and is praised for showing a less successful and fashionable, and thus more realistic type of woman. The series paved the way for series like *Fleabag*, *Catastrophe*, etc. Van Bauwel (2018) investigates post-feminist discourse in the series *Golden Girls*, *Sex and The City*,

*Desperate Housewives* and *Girls*. The author finds in a textual analysis of the portrayal of ageing female bodies that “a discourse on ageing, ‘good’ ageing, and acceptance of ageing is present in the narration (...). The discourse on the masking of ageing, however, is predominant.” (Van Bauwel, 2018, p. 21)

The portrayal of women’s friendships on TV is of importance as it is said to affect the development of same-sex friendships in real life (Spangler, 1989). By offering an aspirational yet realistic depiction that the audience can identify with (Jermyn, 2008), TV series can help foster more supportive outcomes in real life (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008).

The depiction of women and their friendships on television has evolved over the years. Spangler (1989) infers that in the 1950’s, the traditional nuclear family was the typical depiction in representations of women. Single women were seldom portrayed, and if they were, they were seeking a husband. Female friends were not depicted as discussing important social issues (Spangler, 1989). However, according to Spangler (1989) women on TV became over time more self-disclosing in their conversations than men, who speak more about business, power and status. In TV series focused on women’s friendships, the exchanges between characters moved away from family and emotional concerns, and began to include careers, health and current events (Spangler, 1989). Series like *Sex and The City*, and *Girls* are praised for their progressive portrayal of women’s friendships (Freeman, 2013), offering a realistic and identifiable depiction of friendship for the viewers (Jermyn, 2008).

A culminated portrayal of women’s friendships is the clique, a group of likeminded girlfriends to whom female viewers can relate (Gonick, 2004). Cliques can be depicted positively because of the mutual exchange of clarifications, corrections, confirmations, emotional support and mating advice between the members. On the other hand, female friendships are depicted as time-consuming, emotionally draining, and inciting competition. TV shows depict the positive side of women being one another’s ally and comforter (Jermyn, 2008) and the negative side of female backstabbing (Gonick, 2004). Once more, *Sex and the City* and *Girls* are the prime examples. Jermyn (2008) found that female viewers assessed *Sex and the City* well because of the realistic portrait of (group) friendships.

The series *Mad Men* is also an object of analyses pertaining to the portrayal of women. The series is often praised, among other reasons, for its depiction of the female struggle for equality in the 1960s. On the other hand, the allegedly realistic depiction of sexist attitudes is also less welcomed by critics. Davidson (2011) interprets the character of the wife of the main protagonist (Betty) as unhappy for many reasons. She feels caged in her housewife role and paralyzed in the light of her husband’s infidelity. The character of Peggy succeeds to make it as the first female copywriter, despite being shy and timid, and presents an image of an independent, autonomous woman (Rogers, 2011, pp. 158–159). The character of Joan is a sexualized secretary, who struggles with (the consequences of) several office affairs. The character is complex, and its depth extends far beyond the clichéd sexy office employee. She is depicted as positively establishing herself within the restrictive framework of female identities of the pre-feminist 1960s (Davidson, 2011, p. 144). She

is very aware of the power of her sexuality and uses it intelligently to gain mastery over men, superiors, customers and the female co-workers (Rogers 2011, p. 162). Although her job title does not change in the early seasons, she is clearly a leader; women admire her, men respect her whilst desiring her (Rogers, 2011, p. 165). Her high self-esteem causes problems in her private life, as her husband is intimidated by the power she wields with her sexuality and work status. Later in the series, Joan is made a junior partner at the firm, but then her initial identity and secretary expertise prevent her from attaining a status equal to her male counterparts, which is a source of constant frustration. Overall, Rogers (2011) draws, from a professional career perspective, positive conclusions for the depiction of the characters of Peggy and Joan in *Mad Men*. It must be noted, however, that neither woman achieves a consistent high degree of personal and relational satisfaction: the price to pay for a career. The latter may just be related to the need for dramatization, and to the overall pessimistic vision of the series' authors, and less to intentionally negative messages about female autonomy.

## **6.5. The Portrayal of Ethnicities**

A review of all research on the depiction of all, or even many, of the various ethnic groups in (US and European) society exceeds the framework of this study by far. In the following sections, the focus lies on some of the more salient discourses on the portrayal of non-Caucasian groups, whereby attention is devoted to the portrayal in TV in general, in fictional representations including cinema, but the main attention goes out to portrayals in TV series. Based on the volume of research, and the 'melting-pot' fable, the emphasis lies to a large extent on representations in US TV, but on occasion also British and European research is included.

### **6.5.1. Portrayals of African Americans**

The portrayal of African Americans on TV and in series figures most prominently in the discussions on depictions of ethnic groups and is a topic no less salient than the depiction of women pondered in previous sections.

In the US, TV news and entertainment are crucial to the discourse about 'race' (Gray, 2005). Behm-Morawitz and Ta (2011) claim that television is "a pervasive and significant influence in American life" and a "cultural storyteller that should be studied and held accountable for the messages—and subsequent effects—it produces" (2011, p. 52). Kellner (2011) argues similarly: television provides the viewer with material out of which he or she then forges identities. Therefore, television can tell us what it means to be male, female, transgender, European, Arabic, African, Asian, Indian, native, or other ethnic American. Often, these frames also have political implications, since they define who is powerful and who is powerless. According to Behm-Morawitz and Ta, race and ethnicity can be described as "two socially constructed group categories, which reflect cultural values and beliefs and (...) carry great meaning and power" (2011, p. 153).

The lack of ethnic diversity in the US entertainment industry evoked, at several points in time, actions by pressure and watchdog groups, as well as by organizations of industry professionals. In 1999, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) threatened to boycott the networks because no colored people were included in the network line-ups. The NAACP and the major (advertising-based) networks signed an agreement (1999) to create more diversity within the entertainment industry. Since then, the networks have taken every opportunity to underline the changes they initiated. The networks and producers of media content deploy different strategies to avoid the discrimination of ethnic groups on TV. Despite these efforts, however, African American individuals still have the feeling of being under- and misrepresented in the US media landscape (Warner, 2015, p. 636).

A. Nelson (2008) points out, that stereotypes reveal little about their subject but a great deal about the group that holds them. This implies that stereotypes for different groups may vary depending on who do the stereotyping. Generally, African American stereotypes are used to emphasize the disparities from white people, especially their physical, intellectual and temperamental differences to them, as well as their inferior status in society. The stereotypes also function to attempt to show the inevitability of hostility between white and black society, and subordination of the latter to the former. A justification of slavery, segregation and racial subordination was thus sought through deploying African American stereotypes. Wanzo and Clemons (2013) allude to the historically typical stereotypes: "Black characters are servants, caregiving to non-blacks, criminals, singing, dancing, comedic, angry, poor, ill-educated, perfect, self-sacrificing, magical, monstrous, victims, inspirational, violent, very masculine, very sexual, asexual, back talking, and nonspeaking" (2013, p. 374).

MacDonald (1992) makes out different phases in the portrayal of the African American community on TV. In the early years of TV, African Americans were represented in various roles. In this pre-civil rights era, the portrayals of African Americans were stereotypical, to an extent racist, and primarily deployed for the entertainment of Caucasians. In the era of the civil rights movement from 1957 to 1970 "it was considered a risk for a national network or advertiser to be associated with black performers, or with any program appearing to take sides" (MacDonald, 1992, p. 78). In the end, the civil rights movement forced (some) changes in American society, that trickled down to the TV industry and culminated in a golden age of African Americans on TV (MacDonald, 1992). TV fiction now targeted black audiences (analogue to the "Blaxploitation" films in US cinema), featured black actors in main roles or regular supporting roles (MacDonald, 1992). The portrayals, however, remained stereotypical and African Americans continued to be depicted as subordinated to other social groups. In addition, the presence of African Americans was to a large extent limited to sitcoms and children's programs and was neglectable in dramatic series: in 1981-1982 there were no African Americans in main roles in dramas at all (MacDonald, 1992). Further, when indeed present in dramas, African Americans and other minorities (Hispanics), were mainly depicted in ghettos.

On this notion, Ross (1996) mentions a dilemma that creators of drama face: the (pseudo) realism inherent in drama stipulates that 'realistic' negative portrayals cannot easily be substituted with 'unrealistic' positive ones. Positive African American characters in series, e.g., a law enforcer, must be depicted in the setting of a criminal, poor, and unstable black community to fulfil widespread prejudiced expectations of the 'construct' audiences. This setting then, in turn, eradicates any potential positive image effects of the African American 'hero' (Ross, 1996). It follows that positive portrayals of intelligent, wealthy, successful African American characters can be problematic (Jhally & Lewis, 1999, cop. 1992). On one hand, it might lead to a distorted image in the sense of masking real struggles in society, thus leading to the "erasures of political realities" (Wanzo, 1992, p. 374). On the other hand, problems related to portrayal of social classes then come into play. Positive portrayals (that for the most part plainly depict middle-class professionals) are problematic in themselves and could lead to the outsourcing of less desirable and stereotypical features to, e.g. working-class characters, even if these can also be portrayed as "dignified, admirable, or even just plain normal" (Jhally & Lewis, 1992, p. 139).

Acham (2013) states that TV fiction can be an emancipating force, and examines the messages in the popular sitcom *The Cosby Show*. She sees the messages in the series conforming to the political mainstream of the Reagan-Bush era in the depiction of African Americans that never experience racism, because they represent the epitome of assimilation to capitalist middle-class values and behavior types.

A variety of representations in a series is a possible solution to the sketched problems inherent in the portrayal of all ethnicities and disadvantaged groups: "first and foremost, we must understand that real blackness on television requires a critical mass of representations of black people so that one representation does not carry the burden of all" (Wanzo, 1993, p. 375). Price (2013) is not optimistic and sees an era of new racism where "racism doesn't feel like racism because it has been normalized under seemingly colorblind moral codes of decency, behavior, and meritocratic values" (2013, p. 437). A new version of an old problem arises from this new strategy behind ethnic portrayals: by the blatant and ideologically motivated ignoring of system-inherent structural inequalities and racism, African Americans have once more only themselves to blame for their underprivileged status.

### **6.5.2. Portrayals of African Americans in TV Series: Case Studies**

Scholars investigate the portrayal of African Americans in specific TV series. Thomas (2012) investigates the series *Treme*, and concludes that it renders the city's history of racial conflict and injustice invisible by emphasizing cross-racial unity among the survivors of the flood catastrophe Katrina and paternalistic acts by Caucasians (Thomas, 2012, p. 213). In particular, the focus on jazz and heritage music in the series omits the city's highly politicized and predominantly African American contemporary music styles (Thomas, 2012, p. 219). Leyda (2012) connects the

audience's sentiments about a character in the same series to the 'Othering' of post-Katrina New Orleans, and its African American inhabitants.

Brook (2009) labels TV series with a multicultural ensemble-cast "neo-platoon shows". The author (2009, p. 332) states that this kind of series are part of the response of US network TV to convergence. In the early 2000s, some neo-platoon shows were among the biggest hits: *Lost*, *Heroes*, and *Grey's Anatomy*. The author concludes that the portrayals of ethno-racial convergence in neo-platoon series are strongly distorting reality: "The multi-ethnic members of the neo-platoon shows may look different, but they tend to act the same. Historical and cultural distinctions, not to mention persistent ethno-racial inequities, are ignored for the most part, if not denied altogether" (Brook, 2009, p. 348).

The situation for African Americans and Hispanics in the TV series industry has not improved, neither in front of the camera, nor behind it (Brook, 2009, p. 347). The consolidation of the networks WB and UPN in the new CW reduces employment possibilities for African Americans. Brook (2009, p. 349) states: "While sugarcoating difference may be the more prevalent problem of the neo-platoon show, exaggerating difference in stereotypical ways is an issue as well". Regarding the former, *Grey's Anatomy* often bears the brunt of criticism.

*Grey's Anatomy* was nominated several times for the "Image Award" from NAACP, the media watchdog group that monitors the depiction of minorities, with an emphasis on African Americans. Long (2011) analyzes the politics of representation in *Grey's Anatomy*. The author finds that "race-blind" casting (a.k.a. blind-casting, scripting a character without indicating the race) ignores the systemic power relations through which differential experiences are produced and maintained. The African American showrunner Shonda Rhimes may want to challenge some racist institutional norms but maintains older racial formations through updated but less visible mechanisms (Long, 2011, p. 1079-1080). In defense of the production methods, Long states that it is not a complete failure, at times, it subverts those strategies in order to debunk or contradict their associated meanings (Long, 2011, p. 1080).

Warner (2015) investigates blind-casting in *Grey's Anatomy* through a discursive analysis of interviews (with Rhimes and actors) and the portrayed characters. She calls the blind-casting practices in the series "a public relations miracle" (2015, p. 635) and discusses the practice very critically. She finds that issues of racial discrimination are ignored in the series because of the practice:

"For risk adverse networks like ABC to create an ensemble drama with a large multiracial cast, race has to be solely limited to the colors of the body. A strategy of quantity over quality representation, *Grey's* illustrates how diversity is more gimmick than innovation." (Warner, 2015, p. 635).

*Grey's Anatomy* features African American leads without allowing them to have various explicitly African American storylines.

*The Wire* is widely acclaimed as one of the best series ever produced. *The Wire* is an authentic and a realistic portrait of the issues of crime, poverty, drugs and family stress. Many universities, including Harvard, Duke, Middlebury, and the University

of California Berkeley, have incorporated *The Wire* in sociology courses to put a more tangible face on urban social problems. Although *The Wire*, being a crime story, features police and criminals throughout the five seasons, the series is often seen as much more than a cop show. Ault (2013) lauds the series, before criticizing the portrayal of African American motherhood in it: "In its willingness to consistently attack institutions and structures as opposed to individuals, *The Wire* was almost alone on TV" (2013, p. 387). The series used crime story plots and characters to make numerous points about an American city in decay, whereby the city represents the US. Many direct references are posed to the manifold urban social problems that are the result of inequality: drug addiction, underfunded schools, unemployment, violence, gangs and incarceration. *The Wire* incorporates discussions on the effects of social inequality on race relation and urban politics and suggests solutions that are nipped in the butt by the institutional powers.

*The Wire* is conceived as "a visual novel." The basic structural unit is the whole series, enabling numerous stories with character groupings. This concept took into consideration that a large investment on the part of the viewers was required to follow and enjoy the series (Edgerton & Jones, 2008b). Before *The Wire*, no US series were composed in this way.

The trade press devotes attention to recent, predominantly African American TV series, like *Black-ish*, *Dear White People* and *Atlanta*. *Empire*, "a show by black people, about black people and for black people" (Rose, 2015), is a rating success in the United States while flopping globally. "The 'specifically black stories' of series like *Empire* and *Black-ish*, (...) tend to sell only to smaller niche networks outside the U.S." (Roxborough, 2016). Being a show that tells such "specifically black stories" is, however, an important factor for its main audience, African Americans. African Americans made up 63% of the weekly broadcasting audience of *Empire* during its first season (Rose, 2015), a clear majority. This is a group of viewers that has been waiting for a broad portrayal of the African American experience on TV for decades. And it is therefore even more important that a show with ethnic leads has been gaining such wide approval. While the cast of *Empire* is mainly African American, and the series presents its characters in different social positions—many of them successful in the business world—the verdict is still open if *Empire* is in fact a modern portrayal of African Americans.

While the way television is consumed has changed drastically over the past decades, its meaning has in large parts remained the same. This is especially true for how cultural issues are shown on television and perceived by audiences. "But indeed, television continues to be a necessary and viable site for struggle for those now appearing more pervasively on it" (Smith-Shomade, 2013, p. 6).

Because social reality is strongly influenced by the media (Shoemaker & Reese 2014, p. 56), as is the belief of almost all scholars introduced in this chapter, it is important that the portrayal of characters on TV approaches a multi-faceted constructed reality. The complexity of the African American community deserves to be shown. This is already the case for Caucasian characters who are shown to be vastly diverse. One gets acquainted with English nobility in *Downton Abbey*, meth



dealers in *Breaking Bad* and suburban women in *Desperate Housewives*. At the same time, African Americans are still mainly portrayed in stereotypical roles.

### **6.5.3. Intersections of Stereotypes: African American Women**

The portrayal of African American women can function as a prime example of the smorgasbord of distorting representations that originate in media catering to the intersection of racist and sexist preoccupations and obsessions that the audience allegedly displays. Long (2011, p. 1071) quotes Elisabeth Spellman: "While it is true that images and institutions that are described as sexist affect both Black and white women, they are affected in different ways."

African American women were first featured in variety programs on the US networks (Wright, 2014). African American women were often portrayed as ambitionless, loyal, and dedicated servants that perform menial tasks for white families. The representation of African American female caregivers emphasizes white families and characters, whilst African American families are inexistent (Wanzo, 1993, p. 377). Childbearing is, within conservative traditionalism, seen to upkeep a 'race,' and women who failed to be good mothers or obedient wives "were blamed for the race's failure" (Wright, 2014, p. 25). Thus, the portrayal of childless African American women must be regarded as an offensive distortion of representation. Additional stereotypes portray African American mothers as unfit, destined to fail and not looking after their children. The Mammy figure is seen as asexual, badly educated, highly religious, overweight, and functions as a problem-solver (Wright, 2014). Guerrero (2013) summarizes and explains that, to maintain the heavily contested superiority of white womanhood, a crude distortion and disfiguration of black womanhood is disseminated. The NAACP protested portraying African American women in a negative stereotypical way (Wright, 2014). These portrayals often depicted the inferior desirability of black womanhood, and were often contradictory, since African American women were "represented as both hypersexual and asexual, hardworking and industrious and lazy, and nurturing mother figures and emasculating destroyers of the normative family unit" (Guerrero, 2013, S. 178). Dreher (2013) sees a "Black Women's Renaissance" beginning in the 70s that continues into the 21st century. This renaissance marks a rising importance of female African American writers whose works were adapted to film and television (Dreher, 2013). However, the renaissance seems mainly of a quantitative nature, and is accompanied by additional distorted stereotypes. Through these stereotypes, strong "Black womanhood" is shown as hyper-sexual and hyper-violent (Wright, 2014).

A dominant stereotype of African American women is the controlling "Bitch," with traits such as "loud, aggressive, rude, confrontational, and lacking moral character" emphasized (Price, 2013, pp. 437–438). The "Bitch" stereotype paints a strong African American woman "who empowers herself by emasculating Black men" (Wright, 2014). A similarly dominant stereotype is the "Sapphire," which also

portrays a strong African American woman that refuses to be submissive and is “angry, loud, overbearing, and asexual” (Wright, 2014). The “Jezebel” or the “Black slut” is an enduring negative stereotype of African American women: it represents a greedy immoral mistress, a gold digger or a heavily sexualized accessory for males (Wright, 2014). The latter mold is – like the others – not new but has for a long time been confined to programming with restricted access, i.e. adult cable channels content, erotica and pornography.

Even *The Wire* is heavily criticized for falling into the trap of distorted portrayals of African American motherhood:

“The Wire’s representation of black mothers, unlike its representations of almost every other group, reduced them to little more than oft reproduced stereotypes of pathological non-normativity: irresponsible, irrational, and emasculating. In so characterizing black mothers, the shows’ writers undercut some of their own attempts at social critique.” (Ault, 2013, p. 388)

A divergent portrayal of African American women is the “modern black woman.” According to Guerrero (2013), this type of character was introduced in the successful series *Living Single* at the end of the 90s, which focused solely on African American womanhood, and is best compared to *Sex and the City*. Guerrero (2013) describes the modern woman with the adjectives “single, beautiful, accomplished, independent” and the protagonists’ main goal is the “pursuit of a good man and a stable romantic relationship” (2013, p. 177). The African American women were portrayed as hard-working middle-class professionals, had “black racial credibility,” and were all single (Guerrero, 2013). The socio-cultural stereotype of the “welfare queen” was successfully subverted; the characters didn’t need male support or government aid (Guerrero, 2013). In 2012, *Scandal* (ABC) by Shonda Rhimes became the first series where an African American woman plays the lead role in a prime-time drama series on (ad-based) network television (Guerrero, 2013).

#### **6.5.4. Stereotypes of African American Men**

A multitude of stereotypes are deployed in the portrayals of African American men. A very common stereotype is that of the uneducated, unintelligent, ignorant and poor African American man. Guo and Harlow (2014) see African Americans depicted as lazy and unreliable, jobless, and dependent on social welfare (2014, p. 289). If employed, they are depicted in low-status blue collar occupations: as house cleaners, postal workers or in service jobs (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008, p. 242). Another very common stereotype of African American men is the criminal. The African American man is represented as a gangster or drug dealer with violent and dangerous traits and behavior (Guo & Harlow, 2014, p. 289). Behm-Morawitz and Ta (2011) refer to research indicating that African Americans are strongly overrepresented in US information, i.e. news programs and crime reports.

The African American man is typically depicted as physically strong and very athletic (Guo & Harlow, 2014). The highlighting of physical abilities is depicted as

counterbalanced by inferiority in other fields: self-control, common sense, intellect and academic competence are lacking. Bell-Jordan (2008, p. 363) points at the depicted virility of African American men and assigns it to a form of hyper masculinity.

The portrayed interests of African American men stem directly from the outlined stereotypes and are often related to cultural elements perceived to be typically 'black,' e.g., hip-hop culture (Guo & Harlow 2014, p. 289), sports, sexual promiscuity, trash culture, junk food, music and dance, as well as dealing and consuming (illegal) drugs. These are all prominently depicted and are intertwined with character weakness and immaturity.

Means Coleman (2011) sees race linked to class. African Americans are underclass, working poor, and often depicted as lacking in possibilities for upward social mobility, thus communicating the message that African American chiefly fail. Where portrayals of African Americans do not correspond to common racial stereotypes, they are often accused, also by African American audience members, of depicting 'white traits.' Basic positive character traits such as hard-working or intelligent can, in a society under white hegemony, thus be interpreted as white character traits. An African American who shows these character traits is not behaving in race-appropriate ways. The dilemma surrounding 'realistic' portrayals thus also emerges pertaining to the lower social status depictions of African American men and women. The resolution lies in adhering to fairer depictions, as Wanko (1993) indicates, by disseminating a differentiated portrayal of African American characters, to approximate the variety of genuine social realities.

### **6.5.5. African Americans and Comedy**

Jacobs Henderson finds (in 2003) that American entertainment television still operates from a place of whiteness and white hegemony. The field of US comedy sitcoms has been racially diverse to some extent for a long time. Sitcoms with African American main roles such as *Sanford and Son*, *The Jeffersons* and *The Cosby Show* were big successes in the 1970s and 1980s. These series by and large do not address race-related social and political issues. Where these issues are addressed, they are framed as individual problems, thereby shifting the responsibility from the society towards the individual. *The Cosby Show* almost completely ignored the impact of race (Acham 2013, p. 106).

Means Coleman (2011, p. 84) states that exaggerations are typical for African American portrayals in sitcoms. Mastro and Tropp (2004) generalize in a somewhat blunt fashion that the appeal of sitcoms derives from the dominance of one group over another, with amusement stemming from the disparaging of members of the other group, whereby character development becomes unimportant. Where sitcoms rely on stereotypes to elicit humor, racially problematic stereotypes are rendered more salient at the recipients (Zillmann, 2009).

At this point, it is important to recall the notion that the viewer decodes and gives meaning to the message. New comedy seems to ridicule (racial and gender-

based) stereotypes, rather than perpetrating them. In any case, the portrayal on TV remains an arena for negotiation. As Bell-Jordan writes: “we are often asked through media culture to confront films, television, and comedic texts that dare to put race in our face and urge us to consider important racial issues” (2008, p. 369). Means Coleman (2011) states that positive mediations in sitcoms are at hand, but have to be untangled from all the hyperbole and derision. Deo, Lee, Chin, Milman and Yuen (2008) consider sitcoms open to experimental negotiations of stereotypes, since they often operate in a broader spectrum of class, professional or ethnic roles (2008, p. 152). For example, a lifeworld drama series about a hospital largely revolves around a specific type of the population (well educated, high social status, affluent). Sitcoms, on the other hand, are often about a family or a group of friends that consists of members from different ethnic, professional or class groups (Deo et al. 2008, p. 152), which provides a greater potential for social identification.

#### **6.5.6. Portrayal of Other Ethnicities**

In addition to the portrayal of African Americans, authors are similarly critical of the portrayals of other ethnicities and non-Christian religions. Wolock and Punathambekar (2015) explore the general failure of the US-American TV industry to – accurately and successfully – portray various ethnic groups. Amaya (2013) sees potential in the dissemination of relevant messages in Telenovelas, but finds the popular Spanish-language soap *Eva Luna* failing to do so. Mora (2018) analyzes, in a case study of the ‘Colombian’ main female character in *Modern Family*, the mediated social attraction across gender, ethnicity and class in a nonrepresentative sample of viewers. He finds that the character contests the mainstream notions of ‘Latinidad’. Asultany (2013) claims the series *24* challenges stereotypes of Muslims to some extent, but sees TV fiction in general severely lacking in countering the clichéd terrorism frameworks.

African Americans are more present in audiovisual content in the US than other ethnic minorities (Larson, 2006, p. 22). This has recently lead to more visible attempts at portraying this group in a less stereotypical way. Wolock and Punathambekar (2015) infer that other ethnic minorities are thus pushed aside. Stereotyped portrayals can be commercially motivated. Producers and broadcasters might be engaging in the practice of cultural mainstreaming, whereby the increasingly complex and nuanced depiction of African American characters might come at the price of portraying other ethnicities in a more stereotypical way, in order to appeal to the broadest possible audience range.

#### **6.5.7. Stereotypes of Asian Americans**

The stereotype of Indian Americans as particularly intelligent people is intertwined with the “model minority” stereotype (Deo et al., 2008, p. 154). The Indian community has a reputation of being the hardest working, best-educated and most prosperous ethnic (i.e. non-white) group in the United States.

The typical Asian American woman on television often does not have any profession at all; domestic settings dominate her portrayal. She is often represented as very intelligent and well-educated. This is especially common for women with origins in South Asia (Sood, 2016). Not surprisingly, the stereotypical representation of the Indian American woman heavily centers on her role as a male trophy, on her sexuality and appearance. The single outstanding dimension of the portrayal of Asian American women is their physical beauty. Almost all Indian American female stereotypes evolve around the physique and its sexual implications.

Larson (2006) distinguishes two types of (sexuality emphasizing) portrayals of Asian American women: the passive, fragile, and exotic China doll (also named the geisha girl, or the lotus blossom) and the seductive, manipulative dragon lady. The China doll constructs Asian American women as submissive, frail, quiet, and eager to please the white man's gaze (Larson, 2006, pp. 69–70). The dragon lady concept depicts Asian American women as sexually perverse and morally bankrupt. The communality between the two stereotypes is the representation as exotic, sensual beauties available to white men. This form of 'Othering' can be traced to orientalism, a discourse that served the justification of colonialism.

Asian (Indian) Americans are often depicted as workaholics, a feature that, together with family background or marriage, culminates in high-status occupations, such as scientists, doctors, lawyers, or privateers, and a high social class (Deo et al. 2008, p. 154). This affluent depiction is congruent with Asian Americans being the wealthiest ethnic minority in the United States and since wealth is the decisive criterion, the groups became the model minority (Wolock & Punathambekar, 2015).

## **6.6. The Portrayal of Class**

In the previous sections about the depiction of various ethnic groups, it was at different occasions established (e.g., regarding the portrayal of Asian-Americans) that social status and wealth are important determinants of the direction and vehemence of distorted portrayals of non-Caucasian groups. To some extent, this phenomenon evokes the question whether biased portrayals are not more connected to attribution of social status, or social class, than to recognizable exterior 'racial' features like skin color.

### **6.6.1. Class and Society**

Definitions of class vary, but many scholars agree that "class refers to one's position within a social structure of unequal access to available resources (material, social, political). The concept is therefore relativistic and involves categorization within systems of stratification" (Deery & Press, 2018, p. 3). The main concepts are by and large based on the works of Marx, Weber and Bourdieu. For Marx, class is determined by the relationship to means of production, and labor is structurally exploited by owners. According to Deery and Press (2018, p. 4), Marx's early works also "contain the seeds of a more cultural theory of social class." Weber sees class

distinctions also hinging on “cultural status or social prestige indicated by lifestyle” (Deery & Press, 2018, p. 4), which is a portrayable attribute in depictions of class in audio-visual storytelling. The same authors (2018, p. 5) credit Bourdieu and his emphasis on material and cultural assets with a significant influence on later approaches.

Deery and Press (2018, p. 6) infer that scholars predominantly base class membership on interdependent combinations of economic factors – like wealth and income – and social factors like family background, education, occupation and social prestige. The number of classes is a matter of debate: the most commonly applied approach distinguishes between upper, middle and working-class but distinctions into five, six, or just two classes (the 1% versus the 99%), are applied as well in investigations.

Deery and Press (2018, p. 7) name the dwindling of the middle-classes, and the impoverishing of the working-classes as main tendencies in class relations. Both are (by-) products of de-industrialization, and the emergence of a service economy. In addition, the significant upward redistribution of wealth – evoked in the last decades under the flag of neoliberalism and its key elements deregulation, privatization and fables of meritocracy – is “striking” and “since money buys political influence, there appears to be little to stop this trend.”

For decades, class was the least investigated of the main social segregators but remains an important factor in society: “Class matters because (...) it still marks and consolidates power, which means that it also affects the fundamentals of life and death. (...). It affects how we speak and who listens” (Deery & Press, 2018, p. 3). As Deery and Press (2018, p. 1) write, “the topic of class (...) has in recent decades been largely neglected, with scholars turning instead to individualization and identity politics, and politicians to neoliberal visions of meritocratic marketization.” As a by-product of a mounting inequality in Western societies, Academia is, compared to the 70s/80s increasingly a middle- and upper-class realm. These classes traditionally tend not to acknowledge systemic class-based entitlement (Miliband, 1969). In addition, the neoliberal litany that any inequality is based on merit and performance in the classless society provides the privileged with the cozy feeling that all material and cultural entitlement is well-deserved.

### **6.6.2. Class in Media**

Pertaining to class and media, Deery and Press (2018, p. 7) find that

“when it comes to intersectionality, including gender, race, sexuality, and class, the latter is generally the least discussed among them. (...). Indeed in both scholarship and common speech, ‘diversity’ tends to refer not to class, but to the other three terms.” (Deery & Press, 2018, p. 7)

Obviously, since class is – unlike race and gender – not a physical and instantly noticeable feature of, for example, fictional characters, the assignment of class depends more on the recipient, which explains some of the negligence of class in

research. The focus of studies is often on representation of class in media content, and Deery and Press (2018, p. 9) explain why:

“It seems reasonable to suggest that the media play some role in the formation of societal beliefs and attitudes and that representation therefore has significant repercussions. (...). When one class such as the poor is under-represented, this could mean that voters will see less need for providing public welfare. When, instead, there is a larger representation of the affluent, this could be internalized by less wealthy viewers as indicating that something is defective about their own ability and effort. Or if, as is often the case in both television and film, the focus is on the middle-class, this could bolster the idea that more people occupy this class position than a sociologist would recognize.”

As Deery and Press (2018, p. 7) point out, class matters are of importance in media production as well as reception.

Hesmondhalgh (2018) investigates the causes of the under- and misrepresentation of lower/working-classes in media content by reviewing empirical studies in the realm of media production analysis. The author recognizes that working-class people have been largely denied access to the attainment of the skills necessary in professional media work and, thus, to media production. Hesmondhalgh (2018, p. 22) rightly refuses to assign simplistic causality between the scarcity of working-class individuals in the essential task in media production (‘symbol-making’) on the one hand, and the highly distorted representation of the working-class in media content on the other. The author (2018, p. 22) sees the following as additional factors that shape media content: the practices and values of media producers (which are located on the individual level of the conceptual “Hierarchy of Influences Model” of Shoemaker and Reese from 2014), the interaction of organizational processes and human judgement, and the cultural ideas and values about the ‘correct’ procedures (placeable on the routines and organization levels of the conceptual model). On the macro levels of the aforementioned conceptual model, Hesmondhalgh distinguishes as factors influencing the portrayal of the working-class: the political-economic drive towards commercial goals rather than social or cultural benefits, and the dwindling status and influence of the working-class in the political arena(s). Deery and Press see the investigation of portrayal of class in media currently increasing in the light of political events.

### **6.6.3. Class in TV Series**

Butsch (2018) provides a thorough analysis of the portrayal of class (often in collusion with gender) in US domestic situation comedies (sitcoms set in family life and households are – more than workplace comedies – open to depiction of the different classes). Butsch (2018, p. 39) expects very unfavorable effects on “everyday thinking” about the lower-classes by recipients since “effective persuasion arises from pervasive and persistent repetition.” The author concludes that, by and large,

nothing of substance has changed in the way lower/working/poor classes have been negatively depicted during the last seven decades.

Butsch (2018, p. 41) finds a strong over-representation of middle-class ('white collar') family-environments and, at the same time, under-representation of lower-class ('blue collar') settings in the sitcoms, which constitutes a large divergence from the reality in the investigated decades. In the words of Gerbner and Gross (from 1976), this under-representation is "a form of symbolic annihilation" (Butsch, 2018, p. 41). From drama historian Grote, Butsch (2018) adopts three comic types: the Innocent, the Fool, and the Scoundrel. The latter is rare in sitcoms. Working-class men (blue collar breadwinners or unemployed) are, in family sitcoms, almost exclusively portrayed as the Fool. Butsch (2018, p. 41) compares this finding to middle-class sitcoms in which all-knowing and -forgiving super-parents of children (the Innocent) are the key characters. When the Fool archetype is presented in middle-class domestic settings, the woman/mother of the family is assigned the comic function. The visual appearance (figure, posture and dress) diverges strongly between working and middle-class men in the TV series: the former is unfit, has poor muscle tone, is unclean, dresses shabbily, is overweight and unshaven; the latter is well-dressed (in business or casual chic attire), fit, broad-shouldered and straight-backed, slim, clean and handsome. Almost all women in the sitcoms, on the other hand, "adhere to the middle-class norm, slim and trim figures with a narrow waist, shoulders straight and erect posture, as with the middle-class men" (Butsch, 2018, p. 44). Thus, wives of all classes appear compatible with the middle-class men. Butsch (2018, p. 45) finds that in the 50s and 60s, working-class men are portrayed as inadequate, whilst middle-class men are successful and admirable. Although an upsurge of progressive messages is made out by Butsch (2018) in 70s and 80s sitcoms, working-class men remained the Fool, but a few middle-class male leads were similarly depicted, which reflects, to Butsch (2018, p. 46), the high levels of unemployment for professionals during the recession. The middle-class also kept on being portrayed as super-parents in the two decades.

Butsch (2018, p. 46) sees the picture complicating in the 90s: some working-class shows (notably *Roseanne*) depict the woman as the Fool, the discrepancy in appearance between working and middle-class men become smaller, and middle-class men are at times the Fool. However, the middle-class Fool one laughs *with*, whereas one laughs *at* the foolish working-class protagonists. The main tendencies traced in previous decades are upheld in the 90s.

In the 2000s the stereotype thrived once more. The trend towards de-masculinized male leads that is observed by TV critics shows itself class-dependent. The new type of middle-class fun-loving men is still "successful, affluent, slim and trim," whilst his working-class counterparts are still "just getting by, overweight, and flabby, and apologetic to their wives when they get caught" (Butsch, 2018, p. 47). In addition, several super-parent shows are launched and become popular throughout this decade.

Butsch (2018, p. 47) finds it difficult to enumerate all new series and arrive at general conclusions about the 2010s with its "dismantling of the traditional fall debut



of new series, along with (...) cancellations, and replacements and the proliferation of cable networks and streaming services offering original series." In addition, the sitcoms become more complex during this decade. The middle-class super-parent theme and sympathetic admirable men are continued in *Modern Family*, despite innovative characterizations and plots. Numerous shows break the mold by offering mixed portrayals of middle- and lower-class female and male characters, and non-traditional families seem to have become the norm in the 2010s. Nevertheless, the predominant tendencies of the previous decades are all but dead in other sitcoms. In conclusion, Butsch (2018, p. 50) finds that the representations in family sitcoms "undercut respect for working-class men, the working-class generally, and the manual labor by which they earn a living, contributing to their hidden injuries of class."

Deery (2018) investigates how the increasing inequality in society is transformed into entertainment in the shape of scripted fiction, so-called 'reality TV,' comedy and drama, whereby she focuses on exemplary TV series that "feature those at the top and bottom of the hierarchy" (Deery, 2018, p. 53). The author (2018) concludes that comedy takes the sting out of criticism of strongly increasing inequality. "With *Honey Boo*, viewers can laugh off inequalities or, more seriously, conclude that the lower-classes don't deserve better or wouldn't know how to behave if they were elevated" (Deery, 2018, p. 65). The reactionary Trump-supporting nouveau riche 'rednecks' in the comedy-documentary (a scripted reality TV variation) *Duck Dynasty* serve to demonstrate that the 'right' kind of lower-class members can make it big. At the same time, the protagonists remain backward tasteless 'jack-asses' that are ridiculed for the amusement of middle-class viewers whilst serving right-wing political 'common-sense' on a plate to fans of the show. The globally successful costume melodrama *Downton Abbey*, written by a conservative member of British parliament, glorifies the lifestyle and values of the upper-class, "whatever the price paid by other ranks" (Deery, 2018, p. 65). The TV series vindicates inequality in society. Diverging status and privileges of the higher classes rightly remain unchallenged, whilst "sentiment overrides politics and love transcends all" (Deery, 2018, p. 65).

Littler and Williamson (2018) analyze two current representations of the working-classes in TV content (scripted reality TV and fiction) available in the UK (the morally unacceptable types of the welfare 'scrounger' and the abject reality TV performer), and contrast them to the glamorous 'hard work' in portrayals of the rich, assorted nobility and royalty representatives in *The Crown*, *Downton Abbey*, and *Victoria*. Pertaining to the series, Littler and Williamson state: "In contrast with the shoestring production values and exploitative payment ofceletoid reality TV stars, these programmes are opulent productions which package British upper-class life for a global, and particularly a transatlantic, market" (Littler & Williamson, 2018, p. 147).

The archetype of welfare 'scrounger' dates to the 70s and serves, find Littler and Williamson (2018, p. 148), as a distractor from capitalism's inherent systemic flaws, and as an ideological weapon to legitimize draconic cuts in welfare spending in the 70s. The highly vilified immoral archetype is revived in the last decades for the same

reasons (financial crisis and austerity politics) and is applied to already strongly demonized groups in Britain like single mothers, immigrants, and gypsies.

Unsurprisingly, a medial archetype of the white-collar middle/upper-class scrounger (e.g., the carpetbagger, the finance juggler, the money launderer and the tax evader) that has a more significant basis in reality, while exuberantly costly to public finances, is a somewhat frequent figure in crime series but never became a basic staple of the TV offering of information and entertainment: merely trivial offenses remains the media verdict.

Littler and Williamson (2018, p. 149) find that where in the 70s the tabloids were the strongest amplifier of the vilification of the working-class so-called scrounger, at present, it is the format of reality TV, with advertising-based TV at the forefront. At a cultural and historical moment in time where, as Littler and Williamson (2017, p. 152) state, the creative arts (in Britain) are increasingly closed to the working-class, an equally reputation-damaging reality TV format surges that depicts a “working-class based” illicit leisure class. In this format, working-class reality celebrities engage in debauched, immature and unruly leisure activities in “repugnant excess” (Littler & Williamson, 2018, p. 152). The settings of the shows are environments commonly associated with the rich and famous, but the private spaces such as bed- and bathrooms of the working-class celebrities are invaded by cameras. The activities occurring in these spaces (intercourse, defecation, vomiting) are highlighted to portray the protagonists as disgusting. In addition to the distorted portrayals, Littler and Williamson (2017) vehemently point at the reality TV industry’s offer of fake opportunities in the creative arts to working-class people whilst undercutting the media workers’ pay:

“Working-class subjects on reality TV, a genre related to a specific and exploitative mode of television production, are then today insistently being presented as the undeserving poor, feckless in their leisure. By contrast, the marked trend in televisual presentations of the British rich occupies very different symbolic and economic terrain and has been expanded by a recent spate of extremely popular lavish TV period dramas devoted to the aristocracy” (Littler & Williamson, 2018, p. 153).

Simultaneously with the upsurge of reality TV formats defaming the working-class, the rich are reinvented and nobility is shown hard at work in high-end fiction like *Downton Abbey* and *The Crown*. The genre of TV series is not new and the predecessors like *Upstairs/Downstairs* are often associated with Thatcherite neo-conservatism (Littler & Williamson, 2018, p. 153). The key features of the programs are, in addition to the extremely lavish production, the portrayal of hard work by aristocrats in what can be called an exuberant attempt to deny the common and truthful historical conviction that the upper-class by and large lives a life of leisure. In conclusion, Littler and Williamson (2018, p. 156) find that “through these engaging dramas and shaming shows the divergence between rich and poor becomes validated as a historical truth and justified present. Both construct the image of contemporary inequalities as being, above all, deserved.”

## 6.7. The Portrayal of Sexuality

In (pay-TV) high-end series produced and broadcasted during the last decade, the number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and, more recently, transgender (abbreviation LGBT) characters and actors are far from invisible (see *Sense8*, *Billions*, *Orange is the new Black*, *Ozark*, *Suburra* and several other dramas, dramedies and comedies). This trending topic/element/feature has not yet resonated in many substantial investigations and findings regarding scripted fiction.

Becker (2013) discusses gay narratives in *Glee* and finds messages of hope and optimism. Cavalcante (2015) states that the messages in *Modern Family* validate gay parenting, and the author expects emancipating audience effects. Frei (2011) discusses *Queer as Folk* and *The L word* and sees appreciation for gay lifestyles and sexuality, whilst criticizing certain aspects.

Dow (2001, p. 129) finds that “representations of homosexuality have existed since television’s earliest days, although, of course, in limited number.” The fictional homosexual characters were for decades mainly portrayed as criminals, adding another dimension of deviance to those characters. With the growth of the gay rights movements in the 70s and 80s the pressure on broadcasters for more positive representation increased, and “television networks began to view homosexuality as an appropriate topic for ‘socially relevant’ programming; that is, programming designed to sensitively treat the ‘problem’ of homosexuality” (Dow, 2001, p. 129). The paradigm change was reflected first in (one-off) TV movies and somewhat later in TV series like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Rhoda*, *Barney Miller*, *Cheers*, *Kate and Allie*, *The Golden Girls*, *Designing Women*. Dow (2001, p. 129) distinguishes four similarities in the portrayals of LGBT characters in these series. Firstly, the characters were included as one-off appearances, not as an integral part of the narratives. Secondly, the sexuality of the characters is in the episodes the problem or dilemma that has to be solved. Thirdly, the problem gay characters represent “is depicted largely in terms of its effect on heterosexuals” (Dow, 2001, p. 129). Fourthly, representations of gay sex or desire are omitted. Dow (2001, p. 130) finds that the “few prime-time representations of gays or lesbians that have taken the risk of depicting actual gay and lesbian sexual interaction, however brief and avowedly ‘tasteful’, have predictably run afoul of sponsors and conservative interest groups, all of which claim to be representing the interests of the American (presumably heterosexual) public.”

Dow (2001) investigates in her study the comedy series *Ellen* in which the comedian Ellen DeGeneres played a fictional character that came out as a lesbian over the course of three episodes in 1997, accompanied by a string of high-profile media interviews about the (lesbian) sexuality of the actress herself. The series narrative and the media campaign turned DeGeneres into a gay icon according to Dow. Following DeGeneres’ fictional and real coming out, recurrent gay or lesbian characters were incorporated into the narratives of series like *Spin City*, *Friends*, *ER*, *NYPD Blue*, *Chicago Hope*. However, Dow (2001) concludes that in the discourse around the

sexuality of DeGeneres and the character *Ellen*, the personal is foregrounded at the expense of focusing on the (socio-) political repression of the LGBT community. This, the author (2001, p. 136) sees as a “classic television strategy in its representation of marginalized groups, and it blinds us to the contradictions inherent in claiming political progress from media representation.” DeGeneres was invited by President Clinton on several prestigious occasions, but at the same time the ‘leader of the free world’ signed new repressive decrees, and did not rescind existing laws discriminating the LGBT community regarding marriage, adoption, workplace rights, etc. Dow (2001, p. 137) compares the impact of the series *Ellen* to *The Cosby Show*: “The success of the *Cosby* show didn’t erase racial division in this country, it just meant that middle America liked *Cosby*.”

Munt (2006) analyzes the series *Six Feet Under* (HBO) of head writer Allan Ball, about a family with an undertaker business, and finds the narrative reflecting positively on homosexuality in the discussion of AIDS and loss by the death of loved ones. The resolution of the series, finds Munt, proposes an inversion of the in western culture prominent association of homosexuality with death. The series “fabricates a popular gay aesthetic that refigures the traditional equivalence between death, desire, and loss, in which the figure of the homosexual now can stand for the ‘future,’ impelling the viewer toward hope” (Munt, 2006, p. 277).

Symes (2017) investigates the Netflix original series *Orange Is the New Black* and finds that “the show contests the heteronormativity of network television” by representing “a wide range of gender performances, and class, racial, and ethnic positions” (Symes, 2017, p. 30). Although lesbian characters have been (on occasion) present on TV, this wide range of representations of lesbian sexuality distinguishes the series from previous portrayals in serial fiction. Symes (2017) detects an “invitational structure” in the series that results in a “popularization of queer content (...). One of the noteworthy elements (...) is the extent to which it invites female viewers who self-identify as heterosexual to interact with forms of queer media that they would not necessarily seek out otherwise” (Symes, 2017, p. 29). Symes (2017) infers that the main character, a straight-identified woman with past lesbian relationships, guides heterosexual female viewers into the world of lesbian sexuality in a prison, and sees a strong link between the surge of previously unthinkable messages and the developments in the distribution of TV content.

Renga (2018, p. 63) lauds *Suburra. La serie* extensively and finds that the series is “a queer text with an address to viewers spanning continents, cultures, and languages.” The transnational coproduction stands alone among Italian TV series in narrating from the viewpoint of a “non-normative sexual orientation.”

## 6.8. Political Content and Portrayals of Politics

### **6.8.1. Political Content**

Political content is societally relevant. In this realm, the political scientists Mulligan and Habel (2012, p. 122) identify a problem. The entertainment media pose a challenge for the audience, because these tempt recipients to confuse what is news and what is entertainment. The authors (2012, p. 122) see then a dichotomy coming into existence: the part of the electorate that has always been well informed (about political issues), will have no difficulties continuing to form opinions and exercise their political rights. But much of the electorate has difficulties distinguishing 'factual' information from 'fictional' entertainment. To make matters worse, this part of the electorate seems to prefer the latter over the first. This divergence leads to disparities in political knowledge and election turnouts. The authors conclude, somewhat patronizingly, that awareness about public affairs may be increased through entertainment, but exposure to the content can lead to misinformation. In times of 'fictional' information ('fake news') additional dimensions must be added to this discussion. In any case, dissemination of political messages in entertainment and fiction is an important research area (Mulligan & Habel, 2012).

Keyishian (2006, xiii) notes: "All movies are in some sense 'political,' in that they express assumptions about class, conduct, values, and the social order." Fictional stories can be regarded as a source for the viewers' perception of reality and the political realm. Studies on political effects of fictional media content are relatively rare. The findings indicate that there is a detectable impact of dissemination in fiction on political perceptions, attitudes, and on behavior (Eilders & Nitsch, 2015a). A long tradition of separating the concepts 'fictional entertainment' and 'politics,' explains the lack of interest and findings on the occurrence and effects of fictional mediation of political messages (Eilders & Nitsch, 2015b). The authors (2015b, p. 7) follow Hallin and Mancini's (2004) classification of the US media system as a liberal model, that is heavily commercialized and where, in the realm of politics, system actors rely strongly on public support. Large investments are dedicated to media and public relations, which the authors contrast to the situation in Germany, where political PR is allegedly not very prominent.

### **6.8.2. TV Series on Politics**

Richardson and Corner (2012, p. 925) state that if one opens the range for the genre 'political' or 'politics' also to series, that do not "offer politics in such a direct or literal form, but refers instead to the dimensions of everyday life in which people are variously caught up in power relations," then many TV series fall into this genre. This approach is generally taken in this study. This section, however, discusses the TV series' portrayal of the daily business of politics, of the decision-making process that involves professional politicians.

The portrayal of political decision-making is societally relevant. The popularity of the topic among creators of audiovisual fiction seems very volatile. Studies on the portrayal of politics in cinema have some relevance for the portrayals in TV series, as an overlap in the treatment can be made out between the two fictional formats.

Keyishian (2006) investigates the portrayal of politicians in US films, and finds as a main theme to be the “struggle between principles and politics, (...) the relationship of personal integrity and political success” (2006, p. xiii). Haas, Christensen, and Haas (2015) discuss politics and political messages in US films and dissect the relationship between Americans and politicians: “Americans in general do not trust politicians” (2015, p. 17). The authors infer that the portrayal of politicians in movies has an influence, and that the depiction of politicians is inaccurate and invariably negative. Often, politicians are “portrayed as the villains in movies.” “They are frequently corrupt, greedy, self-serving and ruthless ambitious” (Haas et al., 2015, pp. 17–18). Real existing presidents are often idealized.

Richardson and Corner (2012) assess TV’s ‘political dramas,’ because “the bottom line is, that the drama’s national audience are also the national voters” (2012, p. 933). The authors (2012) acknowledge the TV series *The West Wing* as the best known political drama that also attracted the most academic attention. By now, *House of Cards* is most likely to be the best known political drama, of which the creators complain that their fictional interpretation is overtaken by the political reality in the US. The findings of the study review by (Richardson & Corner, 2012) show that most research on political drama consists of evaluative commentary or observation. The commentary “has mostly been about how such drama might or might not be ‘good’ for politics, for political awareness, engagement and development” (2012, p. 932), which is an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

In van Zoonen and Wring (2012), the character of the prime minister in the UK original of the series *House of Cards* is discussed. The type of character in US political TV fiction can accomplish anything, regardless of how difficult the circumstances are. The authors conclude that, in UK fiction, there is no “Hollywood type of hero who is successful, maintains the moral high ground and is physically attractive” (van Zoonen & Wring, 2012, p. 274). The character of Francis Urquhart in (the original BBC production of) *House of Cards* diverges from the common types in UK political fiction and it holds true what is said about politics in US cinema: it is not that we either love politicians or hate them, it is that we love and hate them simultaneously.

The daily business of politics and political decision-making are either the topic or setting of various TV series, and scholars devote attention to (examples of) the genre. Coleman (2008) sees a very limited range of portrayals of politicians in British TV series, soaps like *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*. Eilders and Nitsch (2015b) provide a useful analysis tool for a systemization of the extent of political content in series broadcasted on German TV. Eilders and Nitsch (2015a) also compare a German series about politics, *Kanzleramt*, to its US counterpart *The West Wing*. The authors find few differences and infer that fictionalization levels out national differences in shaping fictional politics. Stockwell (2011) researches security issues in TV series (*The West Wing*, 24) and concludes that the exploration of these issues is superior to the treatment in information media: TV series lead the way in the discussion of corrosive effects on the political leadership of torture and assassination. Abarca Torres (2015) analyzes how the telenovela *El Candidato* attempts to interfere with a key recent political process. van Zoonen and Wring (2012) investigate political fiction in the UK

and find that narratives on the political machinery evolve around the inescapable corruption of politicians. The linkage to real-life politics produces the products' potential relevance for affecting viewers' political understandings, judgements and engagement. Wodak (2010) investigates one episode of *The West Wing*, and reveals the series' political and didactic objectives after an analysis of the dialogues and interactions: the conveying of (US-American) liberal values.

## **6.9. The Portrayal of Controversial Topics**

Creators of TV series integrate controversial topics as a basis for dilemmas that then need to be comically or dramatically resolved in the story. Schlütz (2016) bases herself on other authors and sees the treatment of controversial topics as a key feature of her research object 'Quality TV.' Controversial topics are themes on which little consensus has emerged in public discourse, on which positions diverge strongly in society, and that have the potential to evoke strong emotions. Schlütz (2016, p. 118) mentions in this respect the 'realistic' treatment of current issues like cultural and religious prejudice, social marginalization, gender roles, sexuality and sexual practices, justice and vigilantism, death, violence and torture.

Sperb (2017) distinguishes TV series broadcasted by advertising-based channels from those disseminated by providers of prized content, the pay-TV channels. In advertising-based TV, controversial topics and real problems are portrayed in one-dimensional simplified ways and resolved along legalistic and moralistic formulas. On the other side of the spectrum, series premiered in pay-TV offer a more serious, realistic, critical, non-moral perspective on social problems. These narratives challenge the mainstream norms, values and attitudes (Schlütz, 2016).

Singhal (2004) states that serial dramas are, because of the adherence to notions of realism, more than other formats of fiction equipped to mediate messages on controversial themes. Through multi-layered identification processes evoked in the dramas' 'good' protagonists can be fallible, and 'baddies' can attain sympathy-inspiring features. Singhal (2004) points at the incorporation of various perspectives in certain kinds of drama series that challenges held values, and thus activates opinion building on current social topics. Ultimately, this may induce behavioral changes and the enforcement of legalistic justice is replaced by moral and ethical choices, e.g., by the portrayal of immoral or unlawful acts as understandable, forgivable, or morally justified. It is then up to an audience to decide what is right.

Winter (2011) detects in various (high-end) series attempts to refrain from taking moral perspectives. Schlütz (2016) assigns more deliberation and sees creators of (Quality TV) series purposely and provocatively rebel against what is perceived as the majority opinion on controversial topics. Winter (2011) sees controversial topics as part of the causes for the success of TV series, in that they offer orientation in complex matters to viewers. It follows, that the inclusion of controversial topics is part of a strategy that walks a thin line between offering innovation whilst not alienating an audience. The topics capture the audience interest, but the potentially controversial topics must be reformulated, renegotiated and re-assessed regularly to

sustain the heightened interest. A side effect of this constant renegotiating and personalization of socially controversial topics is the dissemination of harsh social critique that (on occasion) aligns with the opinions of parts of the audience. Frei (2011) sees (certain) TV series thus adopting a socio-political commentary role regarding the dominant ideology and discourse in society.

### **6.9.1. Controversial Topics in TV Series: Case Studies**

Controversial topics in entertainment and in serial TV fiction are to some extent subject of scientific research. Several publications present case studies on TV series. Series set in prison have attracted special attention: *Oz* and, more recently, *Orange is the new Black*. Cecil (2015) sees the format of prison drama offering the possibility to highlight a range of social questions by connecting them to the relatively large numbers of major characters, and the behavior the characters are rightly/wrongly convicted for. Life world and family drama are also in focus regarding the inclusion of social critique. Bobineau (2015) investigates *Shameless*, *Breaking Bad* and *Hustle*. In the first, addiction, poverty, dysfunctional families, negligent parenting, crime and antisocial behavior are tragically discussed, and sympathy for the strongly deviant protagonists is evoked.

After discussing the portrayal of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality in TV series, the following sections focus on various topics that are societally relevant in that they are regarded as controversial within a culture, or in that they touch upon groups not restricted by the aforementioned potentially discriminating dissections.

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) state that media content in the end serves the interests of the power elites, and that the goal of mediation of messages is system maintenance. In the same vein, scholars take a critical view on the messages disseminated by scripted TV series.

Tyree (2009) investigates *True Blood* and the horror genre and discusses critically varying socio-political interpretations. Scranton (2010) investigates *Generation Kill* and concludes that the series presents a “missed opportunity, and that in contrast to *The Wire*, it fails to tell us much about the people who inhabit the contemporary battlefield, how institutional and social structures shape their lives, and how war happens today in the city” (Scranton, 2010, p. 558). Marx (2013) praises *Family Guy* for tapping successfully into the taste of its young audience by satirizing many mainstream norms and values, but sees the series not achieving its full critical potential. Pearson (2013) shows that messages in science fiction are often of an ideological nature, and that story lines are rightfully perceived as allegories for current events. Jacobs (2005) analyses the messages on violence and therapy in *The Sopranos*. Cardwell (2005) discusses the varying representation of youth in series. A range of studies takes a more appreciative stance on (mostly unsubstantiated audience effects of) the content of TV series. Marcus (2013) sees *The Wonder Years* offering political commentary on a formative and controversial era in the USA: the sixties. Murray (2013) praises the series *M.A.S.H.* as a ground-breaking socially relevant comedy. The series is positioned by the author as frontrunner of a 70s trend



in US TV fiction, to turn towards 'relevant' texts. Hendershot (2013) shows that TV, in spite of fragmentation and niche audiences, can still be a forum for negotiating controversial topics in an analysis of *Parks and Recreation*.

Furthermore, Sepinwall (2012) indicates that the TV series with societally relevant contents did not emerge out of a void. "The millennial wave of revolutionary dramas was built on the work put in by a group of other series particularly the ones created from the early '80s onward" (Sepinwall, 2012, p. 11). The author singles out *All in the Family* "as the first show to succeed with a blunt approach to the sorts of taboo subjects and deeply flawed central characters that would come to typify the great dramas of this century" and *Hill Street Blues* that "entails complex narratives of moral shades of grey."

### **6.9.2. The Portrayal of Drugs**

Despite widespread negation of the spread of drug consumption in communication by governments and interest groups, drugs are omnipresent in society, as the sheer size of the drug trade indicates. The estimates of the annual turnover in global drugs markets vary but is always very large and, in media reports, said to be 150 times larger than the arms trade. The omnipresence of drugs is reflected (at present) in the media attention in film and TV fiction, as Sperb (2017) points out. The subject of drugs is in addition deployed, according to Shiner and Newburn (2007), as a symbol of resistance against petit-bourgeois norms and values. This seems a far-fetched conclusion regarding most series.

Sperb (2017) discusses studies that explore the portrayal of drugs on TV and in TV series. The older studies seem motivated by the dangers that portrayals of drugs represent for younger audiences. Sperb (2017) cites work from Greenberg, Fernandez, Gaef, Korzenny and Atkin (1979) who investigated the depiction of alcohol, drug and cigarettes in TV programs quantitatively and found a large presence of alcohol and tobacco consumption, while illegal drugs were largely absent. Christenson, Henriksen und Roberts (2000), as cited by Sperb (2017), focused on popular TV series and investigated the presence, as well as the (positive or negative) contextualization of drugs. Illegal drugs and/or tobacco were present in one out of five popular prime-time series, alcohol in three out of four. Actual consumption of illegal drugs (mostly cannabis) was only found in 3% of the series. The consumption of legal and illegal drugs was almost without exception negatively connoted (Christenson et al., 2000, as cited by Sperb, 2017).

Sperb cites Boyd (2002, 2008, 2011, 2014) who investigated in a string of studies the portrayal of drugs in TV fiction regarding socio-demographic characteristics, roles, and depicted effects on characters. Drug dealers are predominantly male, greedy, corrupt, immoral, African American or Latino; drug consumers are the victims and are typically Caucasian middle-class young adults. In the critically most acclaimed TV series in the 2000s (*The Wire*, *Mad Men*, *The Sopranos* and *Breaking Bad*), alcohol and drugs are often displayed. The strategy on the part of creators, as Schlütz (2016) professes, to seek attention and provoke by broaching the topics of drugs

seems to succeed, at least towards critics. In the series, drugs are treated in a serious, normalizing way and the trade and consumption are shown as multi-dimensional phenomena, whereby the consequences of association with alcohol, cannabis, opiates, cocaine, LSD or methamphetamine are differentiated and not exclusively disastrous.

Sperb (2017) analyzes seven TV series (*Miami Vice*, *Oz*, *The Wire*, *Weeds*, *Breaking Bad*, *Shameless*, *Aquarius*) premiered between 1984 (*Miami Vice*) and 2015 (*Aquarius*) in which drugs play a central role. The author formulates ideal types of the portrayal of drugs based on a detailed content analysis. She labels the narrative patterns as follows: law enforcement, societal critique, moral plea, hedonism, and daily survival struggle. Overall, the first two patterns are most prominent, but large differences exist between the series. The author infers that in the 1980s drugs were legally and morally castigated. Around the year 2000, the polarized depiction was increasingly replaced by complex narratives and fallible heroes, whereby drugs were still deployed as a means of provocation. Since the mid-2000s, Sperb (2017, p. 104) sees a normalization in the portrayal of drugs emerging. The topic is increasingly tackled without taboos and is, more often than before, impartially or even positively portrayed.

## **6.10. Societal Relevance as Success Factor of TV Series**

Studies investigate messages, topics and traits in TV series regarding socio-political implications and possible interpretations by viewers. Often it is implied that the messages are related to audience success. A direct – yet still merely suggested, not investigated – link between socio-political messages and success of a series is established only in some studies.

Redvall (2013) names an exemplary multitude of factors, including societal relevance, pertaining to *The Killing* as the grounds for success:

“The series can be regarded as an example of allowing the creator (...) to develop (...) based on his vision (...). The three-layer structure of all three seasons – dealing with the police investigation, the political intrigues and the private lives of the victims (...) – mirrors the idea of double storytelling with larger ethical and social connotations as an important part of the overall thriller set-up” (Redvall, 2013, p. 18).

Stratton (2008) sees the messages in *Miami Vice*, which the author interprets as protecting white America against Latino ‘anarchy,’ as the main reason for the audience success. In the same vein, the author (Stratton, 2005) describes the portrayal of the Caucasian race in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Pertaining to *Breaking Bad* and the main character of Walter White, Johnson (2017, p. 25) finds that both liberal and conservative viewers recognize that “white, male geniuses had been put to the sword by ignoble forces—and that they would have their revenge.”

Smith (2015) critically reviews *Orange is the New Black*, compares the content to the novel the series is based on, and finds that the series presents the ‘same old’

white heterosexual gaze, which also explains the series' success. In addition, the author points out the variety of elements in the series that cater to opposing attitudes regarding feminism, imprisonment, lesbian relations, etc. This is interpreted as a contribution to the series' success: it offers something for many different groups. L. Kim (2001) describes the nature and effects of 'post-feminist' messages in *Sex and the City*. The messages tap into gradually establishing audience beliefs and opinions, and are a success factor. Cavalcante (2015) expects emancipating effects from messages in *Modern Family* that validate gay parenting, and the author seems to see the messages as one reason for the success of the series. Winter (2011) sees controversial topics as a success factor of TV series, by offering orientation, which seems a very optimistic notion and possibly a strong exaggeration of the effects of messages in TV series. Schlütz et al. (2013) interpret the success of *Dexter* as a result of the series' messages tapping into pro-vigilante attitudes of audience segments. Attwood, Campbell, Hunter & Lockyer (2013) point at the strong basic attraction for the media (audience) of qualities of controversial, i.e. (pseudo) realistic, volatile, transgressive, sensational and shocking topics.

Tendencies emerge regarding the contribution to success of societally relevant topics. On the one hand, in line with premises about hegemonic workings of media, TV and entertainment – as briefly discussed in subchapter 3.3 and elaborated upon by Shoemaker and Reese (2014), Hesmondhalg (2012) and McQuail (2010) – success stems from exploiting allegedly wide-spread anxieties among the construct mainstream audiences and tapping into prejudicial and reactionary attitudes. On the other hand, emancipating and identity-celebrating messages for (mainly Caucasian middle class) groups with a high propensity to consume are related to the success of TV series.

## 6.11. Overview: Societally Relevant Content of TV Series

- TV series disseminate (distorted and distorting) stereotypes

### **Societally relevant topics**

#### **Main social segregator: gender (women)**

- Default portrayal is of men, women underrepresented, portrayed as inferior
- Female characters depicted (for target audience), but controlled by men
- Western white middle-class women most prominent: object of pity, producer of family
- Depiction of working women highly stereotyped

#### **Main social segregator: ethnicity**

- Depiction of African Americans most salient topic → portrayal validates disadvantaged position in society
- Dilemma: positive portrayals → misrepresentation, vs. negative depictions → reinforcement of stereotypes
- Negative African American stereotypes outsourced to lower classes

- Portrayals of African American women: intersection of gender and ethnicity bias
- Serial fiction mainly disseminates distorted image of African Americans, comedies offer more diverse picture
- Distorted portrayals also of other groups
- Stereotypical Indian Americans as model minority, women limited to physique and sexuality

#### **Main social segregator: class**

- Class for a long time less salient
- Overrepresentation of upper and middle classes, omission of lower classes → influence on self-image and socio-political attitudes
- In sitcoms, negative portrayals of working class (men) and manual labor remain
- TV series vindicate unequal distribution of wealth and power and deploy reversed realities
- Negative portrayal of lower classes supports conservative policies and validates skewed wealth distribution

#### **Main social segregator: sexuality**

- LGBT characters over time always present
- Portrayals change from negative deviance to a blend with some emancipating depictions
- Homosexuality often framed as a sensitive problem
- Acceptance of LGBT individuals, not of communities in depictions

#### **Politics and politicians**

- Socio-political messages frequent in fiction → impact perceptions, attitudes and behavior
- Audience of TV series are potential voters
- Mainly negative portrayals (UK), some positive depictions (in US)
- Exploration of (certain) political issues in fiction superior to information

#### **Controversial topics**

- Central ingredient of high-end TV series → success factor on occasion
- Treatment enables opinion building on relevant topics, but often not accurate
- Controversial topics simplified in ad-based TV, serious treatment in pay-TV
- Controversial topics more frequent in certain drama genres: prison, lifeworld

#### **Societally relevant content as success factor of TV series**

- Hardly any empirical evidence, mostly suggested link with success
- Topics/treatments connected to success: political intrigue, social issues, ethics, white heterosexual resentment and perspectives, post-feminist perspectives, homosexual relations, imprisonment, pro-vigilante attitudes, and controversial, pseudo-realistic, volatile, transgressive, sensational and shocking topics.

## **6.12. Societal Relevance: Research Goals**

In the literature review presented in this chapter, the scholarly interpretation of societally relevant content and messages in (mainly) US TV series is discussed. Many of the studies originate in the humanities. This study tries to fill a multi-faceted research gap. Firstly, the nature of societal relevance as an element of European TV series and any contribution to success are of interest. Secondly, to investigate, an empirical approach is taken that is rooted in communication science. To achieve the research goals, the perception of the creators of numerous European and some Canadian TV series on societal relevance is investigated. The results are presented in chapter 11.

## **7. Success Factors of TV Series**

After discussing the influences on content, the outcome in the shape of elements in TV series that scholars (implicitly) regard as societally relevant, and the contribution to success of societal relevance, this chapter discusses success factors of TV series. Two of the success factors of TV series can be content (discussed in 7.1) and societal relevance (previously discussed in 6.10). To enable comparison and to provide a comparative perspective, other success factors are briefly sketched in subchapter 7.2.

### **7.1. Content as Success Factor of TV Series**

Content in general is shown to be of importance for success of media products (Blömeke, Clement, Mahmudova, & Sambeth, 2007; Feddersen & Rott, 2011; Schönbach, Lauf, Stürzebecher, & Peiser, 1997). Various facets of content exercise influence on success, and are relevant also for scripted TV series: genres (Chang & Ki, 2005; Desai & Basuroy, 2005; Elliott & Simmons, 2008; Hennig-Thurau, Marchand, & Hiller, 2012; Simonton, 2009); quality (Bleis, 1996; S. Kim, 2009; Schönbach, 2004; Wolf, 2006); novelty (Bleis, 1996; Joshi & Mao, 2012; Shamsie, Miller, & Greene, 2006); sequels (Chang & Ki, 2005; Elliott & Simmons, 2008; Hennig-Thurau, Houston, & Heitjans, 2009; Joshi & Mao, 2012; Simonton, 2009); famousness of actors or authors (Basuroy, Chatterjee, & Ravid, 2003; Clement, Proppe, & Rott, 2007; Desai & Basuroy, 2005; Elberse, 2007; Elliott & Simmons, 2008; Schmidt-Stölting, Blömeke, & Clement, 2011; Simonton, 2009); and exclusivity (Wirtz & Ullrich, 2009; Wolf, 2006).

Kilian and Schwarz (2013) investigate the success of TV series spin-offs and find that certain conditions need to be optimized for a spin-off to be successful. The fan base of the original series must be large, the intertextuality between original and spin-off must be established, and consistency of plot and characters must include the original as well as the spin-off.

### **7.2. Generic Success Factors**

Sommer et al. (2016) and Verhoeven et al. (2017) find that research on media success factors is a fragmented and inconsistent field. To fill this perceived research gap, the authors distilled generic success factors of media products from literature. Guided by theory and empirical findings, these factors were aggregated into meta-categories, or 'building blocks', of success of which the applicability across media products was confirmed in a qualitative study (Sommer et al, 2016). In addition to the previously discussed building blocks – content and societal relevance – the meta-categories of success are form/design, marketing, distribution, internal processes, organizational facets, leadership, human resources, external evaluation, and environment orientation (cf. Sommer et al, 2016; Verhoeven et al, 2017).

#### **7.2.1. Form/Design**

Design is, like content and societal relevance, (in this study) a category of success factors inherent to the product. The production value of TV series is a

recurrent topic in, e.g., media reports on TV series. The (investment in the) quality of the look of a series, of the *mise-en-scène*, is relevant for the assessment of series: locations, sets, costumes, props, cinematography, etc. In general, scholars find the presentation of content impacting success of media products. Structure, congruence of form and content, and the consistency of the design are the factors of this category of success factors that researchers single out as important.

### **7.2.2.Environmental Orientation**

TV series are made in a very competitive market as discussed in 5.5. and 5.6.; achieving uniqueness and exclusivity might require observing the competition and trends. Home-grown media products and TV fiction reflecting the national/local environment are successful in many markets sampled in this study. In general, media products of which the decision-makers observe the market and are open to input from the social, political and cultural environment are found to be more successful. Adequate environmental orientation is also a prerequisite of any successful marketing.

### **7.2.3.Internal Processes**

As shown in the preceding subchapters 5.6 to 5.8, internal processes and the decision-making in the inner circle play an important role in the successful creation of TV series. In general, the ingredients of internal processes important for success are internal communication and decision-making procedures and strategies, as well as audience integration at development stages, and the project budget of the product.

### **7.2.4.Organizational Facets**

The company behind a media product can contribute to its success. Regarding TV series, the company or organization can be the (larger) production company, the broadcaster or the distributor, as elaborated upon in 5.6. In general, for media products, synergy within the organization (cross-selling and –promotion), the scope of its activities, and the nature and the size of resources all impact success. In addition, networks and cooperations, the match of product and organization, clarity of functions and responsibilities, controlling and scheduling are of importance.

### **7.2.5.Leadership**

Leadership is a salient topic in the creation of TV series (see also 5.7, 5.8). The management of a product is a success factor of media products. Scholars find the executives' maturity, accurate education, and extensive networks positively influencing success. Leaders with a good reputation, with authority within the organization or with relevant expertise are distinguished pertaining to the organization-internal support of a product that influences success.

### **7.2.6.Human Resources**

In the creative 'people-business' of TV series, the composition of the members of the team, the inner circle of decision makers, the crew and the cast (including stars) are a topic of discussion (see also 5.6 to 5.8). For media products in general, scholars find experience, identification with the product brand, motivation, competence, qualifications, specialization, as well as deployment of successful networks to be able to impact success.

### **7.2.7.Marketing**

Marketing, as well as distribution, are potentially important for the success of TV series. The two meta-categories of success factors are somewhat less salient in the previous chapters because the focus of this investigation is on the development and production. The earlier stages of the value chain are more relevant to the research questions than what is done with the finished product in the downstream phases. Marketing and distribution are, however, relevant to broadcasters and are also considered, to an extent, in the earlier phases of the value chain by the creators of TV series.

Pertaining to media products in general, factors like branding, brand management and positioning (also in relation to competing products), pricing, audience and advertising market targeting, market research, community building and word-of-mouth, advertising means and budgets all potentially impact success.

### **7.2.8.Distribution**

Another meta-category of downstream success factors is distribution. Obviously, by whom, how, and where TV series (and other media contents) are disseminated can affect success. Researchers discern the generic success factors timing of publication, release or broadcasting, the deployment of multi-platform distribution and the optimization for audiences.

### **7.2.9.External Evaluation**

The meta-category external evaluation is a market resonance building block of success. As for cinema, books, and other media products, coverage, reviews, awards, 'buzz' and word-of-mouth can be important to TV series. The external evaluation is not part of the development and production processes and is largely not controlled by the communicators.

## **7.3. Measurement of Success of Media Products**

Verhoeven et al. (2017) measure success with several items, one of which is then deployed as the outcome (dependent variable) in a qualitative comparative analysis: the extent to which targeted shares in the audience market are achieved in the eyes of the surveyed respondents. This serves as a proxy for success measures that are for various reasons unavailable or incomparable, like profit and return on investment.



The authors (2017) discern additional success measures: audience reach in numbers, as well as the achievement of: reputation improvements for the organization/company; the targeted turnover in audience and advertising markets; the targeted shares in the advertising market; recognition in the audience market; the generation of artistic/cultural value; and subjective success.

#### **7.4. Overview: Success Factors and Success of TV Series**

- Content → success factor. Facets: genre, quality, stars/reputation, exclusivity
- Form/Design → structure, congruence with content, consistency
- Environmental orientation → observation of market and competitors, reflection of national/environment
- Internal processes → internal communication and decision-making, audience integration, project budget and resources
- Organizational facets → internal synergy (cross-selling and – promotion), scope of activities, resources, cooperations, functions, tasks and responsibilities, cost controlling, scheduling
- Leadership → management, leaders with reputation, competences, authority
- HR → experience, identification with brand, motivation, competence, qualifications, specialization, networks of employees or project co-workers
- Marketing → brand management and positioning, pricing, market targeting, and research, community building and word-of-mouth, advertising
- Distribution → timing of release or broadcasting, multi-platform distribution, optimization for audience
- External evaluation → coverage, reviews, awards, word-of-mouth
- Success → reach in number and achievement of: targeted audience market shares, reputation improvements, targeted turnover, targeted shares of advertising market, and recognition
- In addition: subjective (personal) interpretation of success

#### **7.5. Success Factors: Research Goals**

The trans-medially applicable building blocks of success are distilled from media economics studies (cf. Sommer et al., 2016, Verhoeven et al., 2017) and are at least in principle also applicable to TV series. Once more, a research gap emerges, in this case regarding the meta-categories of success for (European) TV series. The perception of the success factors of TV series by the creators is briefly presented in chapter 10. The assessment of the factors by the respondents essentially serves to

relativize the main research object of this study, societal relevance as success factor, on which the results are presented in chapter 11. Firstly, however, the next chapter (8) informs on the method and the sample that are deployed to achieve the research goals.

## II Method

### 8. Method and Sample

After reviewing the literature, in this chapter I introduce the method and the sample. The analysis method deployed in this study is qualitative content analysis. To answer the research questions, the content of transcribed interviews with creators of TV series and industry experts is examined. Qualitative content analysis suits the explorative nature of the research project.

In subchapter 8.1, the research design is sketched and in subchapter 8.3, the data gathering is discussed. In subchapter 8.4, I introduce the sample. Qualitative content analysis is explicated in section 8.5, and I introduce the formation and deployment of the category systems in 8.6. In subchapter 8.7, the analysis of salience and the conception of ideal types are discussed. In the last section, I deliberate on reliability and validity of the study. Additional substantiation of societal relevance as a success factor is provided by the results of a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). I briefly introduce this method in Appendix 4.

#### 8.1. Research Methods, Elements, Sequence

In communication research applied in private enterprise, it is common to compile different strands of evidence, as if one is in front of a jury in a court of law, instead of relying on the results of one (sophisticated and acknowledged) method. Pertaining to scientific research, also Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) list numerous purposes (or advantages) of mixed methods research and analysis. In this study, I aim to pluck the fruits of combining qualitative research with quantitative analyses and a method that bridges the two approaches. The goal is to achieve complementarity, “elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification” (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017, p. 110) and expansion of the results. In addition, deploying different methods enhances the credibility and integrity of findings.

In the study at hand, the distinct but not strictly sequential steps relevant to the research aim are 1) defining the research topic and formulating the main research questions, 2) establishing the sampling method and executing the data gathering method (snowball sampling of elite respondents, interviews), 3) establishing the levels and units of analysis, 4) developing three category systems, 5) refining and defining the categories after feedback loops evoked by data inspection, 6) in-depth coding in MAXQDA, 7) description of patterns emerging in the data based on the material output in MAXQDA, 8) formulation of logically consistent ideal types of creators in a fourth category system, 9) salience analysis of all four category systems, enhanced by qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) of the success factors category system, and 10) reporting.

## 8.2. Data Gathering: Interviews

The decision-making process about the content of TV series and the assessment of success factors of TV series (in the development and production phases) can in principle be observed, as Redvall (2013) did for the work on one episode of a series. However, for the purposes and sample size of this study, as well as considerations of resources, observation was not an option. Interviews are an important data gathering tool for social research. “Interviewing (...) is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience” (Seidman, 2015, p. 22)

In the data gathering, I deploy, what Seidman (2015, p. 28) calls, “in-depth phenomenologically based” interviews. The interviews aim to have the participants reconstruct (and interpret the meaning of) their topical professional, yet transitory and subjective experiences. The latter attributes evoke the sampling of interviewees currently engaged in the investigated experiences (Seidman, 2015, p. 33).

To answer the four main research questions, I conducted interviews based on individualized semi-structured questionnaires with thirty-two professional creators of TV series (writers, producers, developers). In addition, I interviewed three experts in the TV series industry (a festival programmer, a consultant, a procurement manager).

The basic content of the deployed interview questionnaire with open-ended questions was distilled from theory, studies and journalistic investigations on the production and content of TV series. See Appendix 1 for the questionnaire. The questionnaires were in addition customized for every interview partner based on supplementary desk research into the professional background of the interviewee and his/her TV series. The general questionnaire was adapted after a pre-test with the first interview partner, and again after the first interview in English. Examples were added for deployment if needed. Forty-two TV series are discussed in a large extent of detail in the interviews, numerous others were superficially touched upon. Congruent with Seidman (2015) the interviews consist of three phases: a focused career history, the details of experiences and a reflection of the meaning. The interviews were informal in nature and always discussed the career history; interpretations and measurements of success; success factors of TV series; types and genres of TV series; distributors, broadcasters and audiences; product markets; content development and production processes; budgets and costs; decision-making and greenlighting processes; hierarchies; and societally relevant contents. All interviews followed the same structure to allow the interviewer and the participants to stay focused (Seidman, 2013, p. 37). In interviewing professional creatives who communicate about their work leeway needs to be given to the variations in (length and content of) recounts of, and reflections on, intricate experiences. Seven face-to-face and twenty-seven telephone interviews were carried out from December 2014 to November 2017. One interview (with Janssen and Hermans, see subchapter 8.3 on the sample) consisted of a conversation with two respondents. The interviewees were in the same office on the same line and could thus hear and potentially influence

each other. However, the respondents disagreed on several occasions, indicated reservations about what the other said and provided diverging answers. Although the double interview was unintended and is methodically not entirely correct, the gathered data of the two interviewees can be regarded as sufficiently valid and are included in the analysis.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours and 30 minutes, the average duration is approx. 1 hour and 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Over 5'500 statements were extracted from 34 interviews and assigned to the codes. The transcribed interviews amount to approximately 300'000 words on 600 pages.

In executing the interviews, I first introduced the research project, its aims, its product (a scientific thesis), the role of the participant and the interviewer. It made clear to the participants that I do not have an influential position regarding their career and reputation in the TV series sector. Self-censoring and tactical staging by 'intimidated' interviewees can be largely ruled out. I tried to establish a relaxed atmosphere and rapport by emphasizing shared interests. Seidman (2015, p. 99-115) formulates general guidelines for interviews that I adhered to. The interviewer is listening more than talking. I listened for different types of answers and tried to distinct the inner (truer) voice from the outer (strategic) voice that produces contextually desirable information. I elaborated on topics with (prepared and improvised) follow-up questions to achieve clarity (especially pertaining to complex chronological events and experiences), circumvent strategic answers and enhance the exploration of certain topics. I deployed the interview structure flexibly to maintain the flow of the conversation, whilst keeping track of the covered topics. Seidman (2015, p. 104) recommends asking open ended (not leading) questions and refraining from interrupting. It was superfluous to ask the interviewees to tell a story because most of them are already storytellers at heart. The friendly, egalitarian and fandom nature of the interviews evoked me to talk somewhat more about my own impressions, preferences and assessments of TV series than I had intended. Thus, on a few occasions, I omitted answers that were evoked by - at times - highly engaged discussions between interviewer and interviewee from the analysis. See also the section on limitations (14.9.) for further discussion of the deployed data gathering method.

The deployed method of data collection is particularly suitable for exploratory research questions such as the ones investigated in this study. It allows the researcher a) to evaluate which factors influence the content of TV series, b) to determine which influences are most prominent, c) to find out which content elements are regarded as societally relevant by creators of TV series, and d) to analyze to what extent these elements are perceived as contributing to success of the creators' products. Strictly speaking, interviews only allow us to explore influences and success factors as they are perceived by interviewees and portrayers. However, since neither (the strength of) the "true" influences on TV series content, nor the "true" success factors are feasibly accessible, the accounts of the involved individuals serve as suitable proxies.

### 8.3. Sample

The study at hand is of qualitative, explorative nature and is not representative in statistical terms. It must be noted, however, that a fair share of the creators of the modest number of current TV series made in most of the sampled countries were indeed surveyed. This premise assigns the findings, although not representative, with a large degree of significance pertaining to the TV series industry of countries with a limited output of TV series.

The topic of the research project is societally relevant content and an extent of understanding on the part of the researcher of the origin of the interviewee (and the setting/market of his/her TV series) is a prerequisite for any meaningful analysis and interpretation.

The deployed snowball sampling method is an established method for elite groups (Phalen & Osellame, 2012), and was confined to Europe and Canada. The sample in this study consists of TV series' creators and experts from some of the countries/markets leading in a) production of series in numbers (UK, Germany, Canada) and b) international audience reach and reputation (UK, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Belgium), and is further based on c) access to potential interview partners (The Netherlands, Italy) and funding-related relevance (Switzerland).

The sampling of roles/functions in the creation of TV series is based on the literature review, on the first interviews and on desk research of the trade press. All evidence points at a direct and large influence of writers on the composition of content of TV series. The other influential functions (developers, producers) are also included in the sample. To reflect and validate, I also interviewed experts exercising important functions in the TV series industry.

The TV series discussed in detail by the interviewed creators are produced, distributed and/or financed by: PSBs (20), ad-based channels (19), and pay-TV suppliers (3).

Redvall (2014, p. 194) pleads for an investigation not only of successful series, but also of products that did not flourish, had little audience success and/or were prematurely cancelled. This study fills this gap.

Table 2. Sample

	Name	Country	Function/role	Type of broadcaster of TV series	Main TV series of creator
1	Fischer	CH	Independent producer	PSB	Crime drama <i>Der Bestatter</i>
2	Fitze	CH	Head fiction, developer	PSB	Crime drama <i>Der Bestatter</i> , hospital drama <i>Tag und Nacht</i> , lifeworld dramedy <i>Lüthi und Blanc</i> , international co-production of crime drama <i>The Team</i>
3	Alber	CH	Developer, dramaturgy	PSB	Crime drama <i>Der Bestatter</i> , editor <i>Tag und Nacht</i>
4	Lüthi	CH	Editor	PSB	Crime drama <i>Der Bestatter</i> , hospital drama <i>Tag und Nacht</i> , life world dramedy <i>Lüthi und Blanc</i> , crime series <i>The Team</i>

5	Schweizer	CH	Expert: PSB procurement manager fiction		
6	Mayor	CH	Head of fiction, developer	PSB	Lifeworld drama <i>Station Horizon</i> , other series
7	Irlé	CH	Independent writer and producer	PSB	Lifeworld drama <i>Station Horizon</i>
8	Gabold	DK	Developer, former head of fiction	Independent production company, formerly at PSB	Series for PSB: crime dramas <i>The Killing</i> , <i>The Bridge</i> , political drama <i>Borgen</i> , science crime drama <i>DNA</i> in development for production company
9	Widman	S	Producer	PSB	Science fiction drama <i>Real Humans</i>
10	Ahlgren	S	Producer & writer	PSB, ad-based	Crime dramas <i>The Bridge</i> , <i>Gåsmamman</i>
11	Wännström	S	Independent producer	Ad-based, PSB	Crime drama <i>Gåsmamman</i> . Other TV series for PSB
12	Grisoni	UK	Writer	PSB, ad-based	Lifeworld drama <i>Southcliffe</i> for PSB, other TV series for ad-based channels
13	Smith	UK	Writer	PSB, ad-based	Lifeworld drama mini-series <i>One Night</i> for PSB, other series for ad-based TV
14	Gallagher	UK	Writer	Ad-based, PSB	Science crime drama <i>11<sup>th</sup> Hour</i> for ad-based channel, other series
15	Deroche-Miles	UK	Expert: festival programmer TV series		
16	Wood	UK	Expert: consultant TV series industry		
17	Beraud	CAN	Head fiction, developer, producer	PSB, formerly at ad-based broadcasters	Lifeworld/prison drama <i>Unit 9</i> , other series for PSB and ad-based channels
18	Kropf	D	Writer	PSB	Crime dramedy <i>Koslowski &amp; Haferkamp</i> , crime series <i>SOKO Leipzig</i> , <i>Der letzte Bulle</i>
19	Winger	D	Producer	Ad-based, PSB	Spy drama <i>Deutschland 83</i> for ad-based channel, other TV series for PSB
20	Gram	DK	Writer	PSB	Finance crime drama <i>Follow the Money</i> , political drama <i>Borgen</i>
21	Terjung	D	Writer	Ad-based, PSB	Police dramedy <i>Josephine Klick</i> , procedural dramedy <i>Danni Lowinski</i> for ad-based channel. Other series for PSB and ad-based channel
22	Berggren	N	Writer & producer	Ad-based, PSB	Crime drama <i>Elven</i> for ad-based channel, other TV series for PSB
23	Gylling	DK	Writer	Ad-based, PSB	<i>2900 Happiness</i> for ad-based channel, adventure (youth) series <i>Tidrejsen</i> for PSB, other series
24	Scherfig	DK	Writer	PSB, pay-TV	Crime drama <i>The Bridge</i> for PSB, developer for pay-TV
25	Østerbye	DK	Writer	Ad-based, pay-TV	Lifeworld dramedie <i>Rita</i> for ad-based channel, other series
26	Van Passel	B	Producer	PSB, ad-based, pay-TV	Psychological thriller <i>Tabula Rasa</i> initially for ad-based channel, picked up by PSB, other series for pay-TV
27	Arlanch	I	Writer	PSB	Head writer <i>La Strada di casa</i> , writer <i>Sotto copertura</i>

28	Ramosino	I	Creative producer, writer	PSB, pay-TV	Creative producer <i>The Medici</i> , writer <i>Sotto copertura</i> for PSB, other series for pay-TV
29	Andreatta	I	Head of fiction, developer	PSB	<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> , <i>The Name of the Rose</i> , <i>The Medici</i>
30	Careddu	I	Writer	PSB	<i>Rocco Schiavone</i>
31	Petronio	I	Head writer	Pay-TV, ad-based	Head writer <i>Suburra</i> for pay-TV, writer <i>Squadra Mobile</i> for ad-based channel
32	Hermans	B	Developer, producer	PSB	Lifeworld drama/soap <i>Thuis</i>
33	Janssen	B	Content manager, developer	PSB	Lifeworld drama/soap <i>Thuis</i>
34	Grotenhuis	NL	Producer, director	PSB, ad-based	Producer <i>De Zuidas</i> , for PSB, director <i>Goudkust</i> for ad-based TV
35	Mosholt	DK	Writer & producer	Pay-TV, PSB, ad-based	Showrunner <i>The Rain</i> for pay-TV, writer <i>Rita</i> for ad-based TV, <i>Follow the Money</i> for PSB

## 8.4. Qualitative Content Analysis

In the investigation of the data, qualitative content analysis is deployed. For the deployment of qualitative content analysis speaks that the research aim is to explain and understand the processes and relations, whereby the general, as well as the special, the unique, is of interest in approximating the full complexity of the research topic.

The explications below are largely based on the work of Mayring (2000, 2015). On qualitative content analysis, the author states: “the main idea of the procedure of analysis is (...), to preserve the advantages of quantitative content analysis as developed within communication science and to transfer and further develop them to qualitative-interpretative steps of analysis” (2000, (2); Mayring, 2000, p. 105)).

Mayring (2000) refers to work by Krippendorff from 1969, and Becker and Lissmann from 1973, and sees content analysis as enabling the differentiation between levels of content: primary content, latent content and formal aspects. Content analysis thus embeds the text into a model of communication within which it defines the aims of analysis. The research project at hand investigates the perception of creators of TV series on a) decision-making in their products, on b) the strength of factors influencing the content, on c) the nature of societally relevant messages in TV series, and, finally, on d) the degree to which societally relevant content contributes to success of TV series. In addition, the general success factors of TV series are briefly discussed.

In this approach, creators are purposeful communicators that may have the opportunity to include intentional messages that carry at least an expectation of the preferred readings by recipients. In this process, the creators are enabled and/or restrained in their communication by a number of factors. The statements formulated in interviews by the creators are regarded as proxies for the actual influences on content, for the nature of societally relevant elements and for their contribution to success. It follows that any statements discussing, assessing, informing on the research questions are the primary content to be analyzed. Other statements by



interviewees, as well as background research, provide this study with the latent content that serves to put the interviewees and their statements in a theoretically/empirically relevant context, among other reasons, to reveal potential bias. Thirdly, regarding formal aspects, the frequency of statements within an interview is incorporated to enable establishing the relative prominence of (sub-) categories per interviewee and, in a second step, across the total data. Mayring (2000, (5)) states: "Qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification."

Mayring (2000, (7)) elaborates on what he sees as the advantages of qualitative content analysis. Firstly, the proposed qualitative content analysis requires predetermining which part of the communication or text will be analyzed, which aspects of the communicator are relevant, what the context of the text production is, what the socio-cultural background of the communication process is, and what effects messages in the analyzed text are thought to have. In this way, the method aims to fit the material into a model of communication. In this study, the unit of analysis is the topically coherent delimitable statement by a respondent that informs on the research questions. The aspects of interest of the communicator (creator) are based on the individual level influences of the conceptual model by Shoemaker and Reese (2014): demographic information; communicated socio-political and cultural norms, values, attitudes; professional experience, opinion, role, position and relative power in the organization of the development, production and distribution of TV series. The respondents communicate to answer the interview questions, and explain opinions, processes and decisions in the creation of TV series and the inclusion of messages. The communication process under investigation here is the creation of the content of TV series in which messages are mediated.

Secondly, in the deployment of the method, rules are to be adhered to: stepwise analysis accompanied by procedural rules and devising the data into content-analytical units (see sections below).

Thirdly, the categories under investigation are central to the analysis. The category system (A) pertaining to the influences on TV series content is based on the conceptual model "Hierarchy of Influences" by Shoemaker and Reese (2014), supplemented with notions on perception of influences by Hanitzsch et al. (2010). Shoemaker and Reese (2014) distinguish five levels of influences on media content and list per level the factors that were shown to affect media content. Additional factors placeable at the different levels that are relevant to TV series emerged in a literature review (Backstein, 2001; Boyken, 2014; Danneil, 2014; Dreher, 2014; Edgerton & Jones, 2008a; Gormász, 2015; Haggins, 2005; Holt, 2013; Jaramillo, 2013; Kallas, 2014; Kelso, 2008; Leverette et al., 2008; Lotz, 2014; B. Martin, 2014; McCabe & Akass, 2007; Mittell, 2015; Nesselhauf & Schleich, 2014a; Phalen & Osellame, 2012; Redvall, 2013). In the category system, the levels of influences are the main categories, and the factors are items/codes.

The second category system (B) 'Success Factors' is entirely based on a completed investigation of success factors and enables the comparison of societal relevance with other meta-categories of success factors, as established in works by Sommer et al. (2016) and Verhoeven et al. (2017).

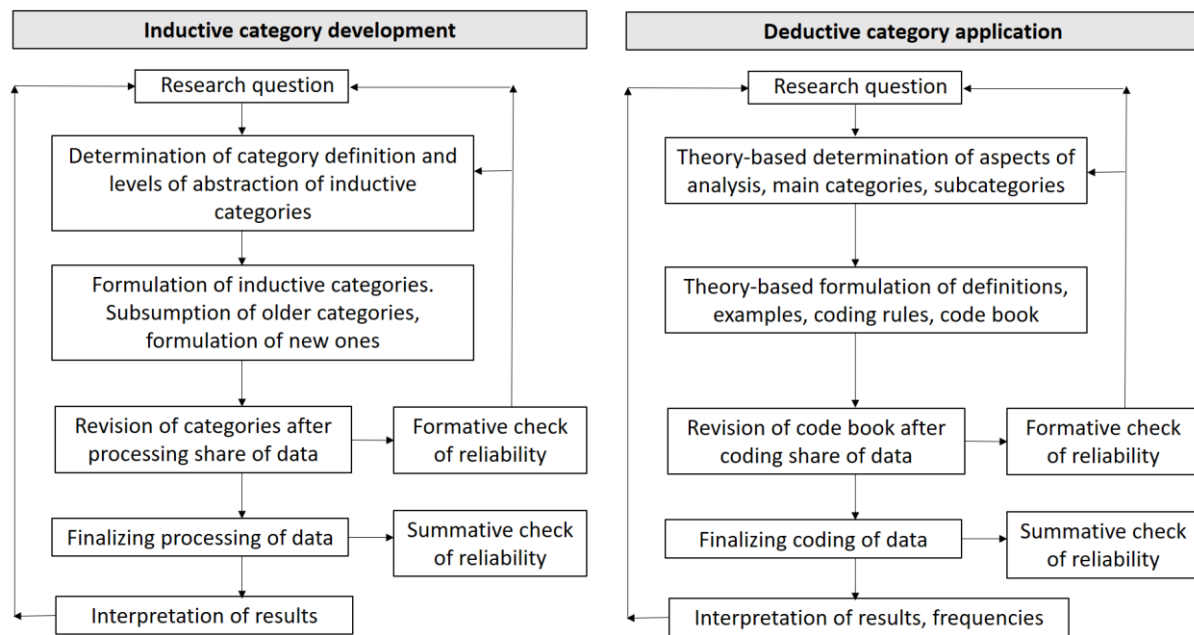
The third category system (C) pertains to societal relevance itself. This category system is also based on an extensive literature review (Behm-Morawitz & Ta, 2011/2011; Creeber, 2007; Dreher, 2013; & Nitsch, 2015b; Frei, 2011; Gray, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2012; Klein, 2011; Landreville & LaMarre, 2013; Price, 2013; B. Rose, 2008; Schlütz, 2016; Scranton, 2010; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Smith, 2015; Stockwell, 2011; Stratton, 2008; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013; Tyree, 2009; van Zoonen & Wring, 2012; Warner, 2015; Wolock & Punathambekar, 2015) from which the main categories (race, gender, class, sexuality, realism, politics, controversial topics) and some of the items (codes) belonging to the categories are retrieved. The third category system is by comparison to the first less exhaustively theorized and is thus more constructed in an iterative way than the first. New codes were added to the third category system.

The fourth category system (D) consists of the ideal types of creators and is entirely iteratively established after the initial data processing, the phase of inductive category building. The development of the category and application of it serves to shed light on dominant tendencies in the large volume of data pertaining to the research questions.

## **8.5. Development and Application of Category Systems**

Qualitative content analysis is an analysis method without ex-ante formulated theoretical hypotheses. Nevertheless, the method is systematically carried out to render a comprehensible research process. Mayring (2000, (8)) introduces two different procedural approaches regarding category systems: "inductive category development and deductive category application."

Figure 7. Step models of inductive category development and deductive category application



Source: Mayring (2000, (11), (14))

Regarding inductive category building, Mayring (2000, (12)) states: "The main idea of the procedure is, to formulate a criterion of definition, derived from theoretical background and research question, which determines the aspects of the textual material taken into account." Following this criterion, the material is worked through and categories are tentative and step by step deduced. Within a feedback loop those categories are revised, eventually reduced to main categories and checked in respect to their reliability. In the study at hand, the procedure of inductive category building has been carried out for the main category systems. In this iterative coding process, the (sub-) categories, their characteristics and dimensions are established, supplemented, completed and/or refined step by step. The looped comparison of preliminary results and the interpretation of new data and codes can be understood as continuous validation, project-internal securing and compacting of the results.

Regarding 'deductive category application', Mayring (2000, (15)) states: "The main idea here is to give explicit definitions, examples and coding rules for each deductive category, determining exactly under what circumstances a text passage can be coded with a category. Those category definitions are putted together within a coding agenda."

For all category systems, both procedural approaches have been carried out, whereby the category systems pertaining to influences on content of TV series and success factors of TV series were to a large degree pre-established, and the category systems of societal relevance and ideal types of creators were (more or entirely) iteratively established. All category systems also rest on emerging codes, the two latter systems more so than the two former ones. See Table 3.

Table 3. *Category systems, procedural approaches and analyses*

<b>Category system</b>	<b>(A) Influences on content of TV series</b>	<b>(B) Success factors of TV series</b>	<b>(C) Societal relevance as success factor of TV series</b>	<b>(D) Ideal types of creators</b>
<b>Inductive category development</b>	High (to large extent executed)	Low (to small extent executed)	Full (fully executed)	Full
<b>Deductive category application</b>	Full	Full	Full	Full
<b>Descriptive (qualitative) analysis</b>	Full	Medium (moderately executed)	Full	Full
<b>Salience (qualitative- quantitative) analysis</b>	Full	Full	Full	Full

The data were subjected to an initial content analysis that aimed, mainly, to describe, delimit the research field and conceive of category systems.

Pertaining to the category system (A), at the first stage I deployed a temporary code list for the analysis of influences and their power in decision-making, and relied on emergent categories and codes (Mayring & Gläser-Zikuda, 2008). In the second phase, by deploying MAXQDA for application, all relevant statements by creators on influences and outcomes of decision-making processes were extracted, grouped, and ordered according to the factors in the conceptual models and additional emergent codes. All statements assigned to the categories and codes were subsequently rendered, summarized, characterized, and a degree of perceived power in the decision-making processes was determined based on salience and tendency of the statements. The preliminary findings, as well as the results, were examined and compared repeatedly to the global impression and the relevant passages of the interviews, to cross-validate and strengthen the results.

Pertaining to success factors of TV series (category system (B)), the categories and codes were ex-ante defined and based on previous studies by Sommer et al. (2016) and Verhoeven et al. (2017). The statements were assigned to the pre-existing categories in MAXQDA. The analysis of this category system enables comparisons but does not directly inform on the research questions. The descriptive analysis of this category system is confined to presenting some illustrative evidence. The perceived importance for success of the categories (i.e. meta-categories of success

factors) besides societal relevance was once more based on salience and tendency. The interpretations of success were assigned to various types.

For the category system (C), societal relevance as success factor of TV series, first the broad contours of relevant categories were developed. In the first phase the statements were assigned to these preliminary categories. Here often additional categories and codes (sub-categories) were added. In the second phase, the statements were in MAXQDA assigned to the categories and codes. In this phase again codes and sub-categories were added. The output was summarized, characterized, and the contribution to success was determined based on salience, and tenor of the grouped statements.

The category system (D), ideal types of creators, was initially based on inspection of the data and preliminary findings after the inductive category building phase. The various tendencies in the data were elucidated by extrapolation. Four categories (ideal types) emerged. In the second phase, the application of categories and codes, it proved to be necessary to add two categories because the original ideal types showed internal inconsistencies and contradictions. Statements from the interviews were assigned to the ideal types by deploying MAXQDA.

## **8.6. Salience and Ideal Types**

Classical qualitative content analysis is enhanced by an investigation of salience of categories (i.e. first-level codes) and (second-level) codes. Elements of the data were quantified (based on the number of words in statements assigned to the category or code) and their occurrence compared, to render an overview of the empirical evidence and to substantiate findings (Mayring, 2000).

In social science, real and ideal types are distinguished. Real types are based on distinct empirical operationalizations and detection of quantitative distributions (Tippelt, 2010, p. 116). Real types are specifically constructed based on empirical values and relations between variables or characteristics. In the data analysis of this study the salience of assigned codes is deployed to attain insights into prominence of certain patterns in the data, e.g., per interviewee (and his/her TV series), per subsample and in total. Detailed descriptions and manifold quotations explicate the tendencies in the data, and the analysis of salience enables further comparisons and interpretations.

In a next step, after the coding procedure and the detailed description of evidence for, and salience of, codes and categories, the volume and complexity of the data evokes me to formulate and deploy ideal types of creators. This process serves the attainment of knowledge about the evidence in the data whilst reducing information (Tippelt, 2010) by structuring, ordering, and comparing data. Abstracted ideal types are the result of isolation and extrapolation of concrete empirically evidenced tendencies and phenomena (Tippelt, 2010, p. 116). Ideal types are more general than real types, are deductively conceived, mentally constructed and they characterize evidence in a systematic way. Thus, the ideal types of creators

encompass the combinations of logically consistent, extrapolated dimensions (values) pertaining to the central research questions. Then, the ideal types can be assigned to respondents, and in aggregation to the entire sample and sub-samples based on relevant characteristics, like the business model of the broadcasting organization, the role/function of the respondent and country of origin of TV series and creators.

## **8.7. Reliability and Validity**

Mayring (2000, (7)) discusses reliability and validity and states that the method of qualitative content analysis has the pretension of being inter-subjectively comprehensible. In this study, the systematic research procedure, a detailed code book that is based on theoretical concepts and empirical studies, as well the category systems support inter-subjectivity. However, the explorative nature of the study and the adaption of the method, the code book and the category systems to the object of investigation, inhibit instantaneous deployment for other research topics.

The reliability and validity are enhanced by multiple analysis procedures: 1) open coding; 2) development of category systems; 3) application of predetermined codes (the category system of success factors), application of predetermined codes as well as emergent codes (category systems of influences on content, societal relevance, and ideal types) and 4) comparison of results to other studies (triangulation) at various stages.

The unit of analysis is internally coherent statements of respondents. The fragments that are regarded as statements vary in length, but the salience analyses are based on numbers of words and are thus not impacted.

Throughout the application of codes, I deployed multiple coding. The same statement of a writer on the good cooperation with a broadcaster's developer can be coded as an evidence of, for example, 1) the success factors 'organization aspects - support' and 2) 'leadership – power promotor', 3) the influence factors 'organization level – policies' and 4) individual level – professional – roles – developer' and, 5) the ideal type 'the paymaster servant.' All important data are integrated in the relevant categories and are also included in the various analyses. In the descriptive analysis, the statement can be used as an example of evidence for one of the codes and in the salience analysis the statement is included in all categories.

Regarding validity, Mayring (2015, pp. 125–129) lists different criteria. Semantic validity was assessed by comparing the statements with the same codes to each other and to the assigned category. Sample validity is in this explorative study per se not a criterion. Nevertheless, a large sample that covers all (in Switzerland), most (Denmark), or many (Italy) of the recent TV series was investigated. For the other countries, a marginal share of the TV series output is informed upon by the interviewees. Correlative validity is established by comparing the results to previous studies and by deploying conceptual models formulated for research of other media products and processes. Prognoses are formulated based on the results. This process fulfils another validity criterion. The construct validity was established by deploying

concept building and content analysis similarly to previous projects (cf. Sommer et al, 2016, Verhoeven et al., 2017). In addition, I attained substantial contextual knowledge and I deploy several established models and theories. The trade press investigation informs on the experts' opinion, so do the actual interviewees of the study, a well-informed elite group of respondents.

A formative check of the instrument was – during the inductive category building phase – based on the procedures as suggested by Mayring (2000, 2015) after processing a share of the data (see 8.5). The explorative nature of the research prevented quantified tests at earlier stages because new codes were continuously introduced and categories realigned. The preliminary categories and codes were, however, evaluated regarding applicability and comprehensiveness by comparing them to the original data.

Mayring (2015, pp. 126-127) lists criteria for the assessment of reliability. Stability (and in a sense, reproducibility) was tested in the shape of intra-coder reliability measured in a re-test (Mayring, 2015, p. 123). I re-coded 729 of 5780 applied codes from the 34 interviews. The re-coded fragments were randomly selected. Between coding and re-coding, at minimum three months went by. Cohen's Kappa is an often-deployed measure of inter/intra-coder reliability but is not relevant here. The categories and codes are to a fair degree distinct but entail different perspectives on the same phenomena and are thus strictly speaking not mutually exclusive. In addition, with a very large number of categories, second, third and fourth level codes it is not feasible to consider any agreement between assigned codes as a product of chance. To test reliability, the measure of percent agreement is calculated and is around 80% for the categories and the second level codes (see Appendix 3). These two types of codes are deployed for both salience and descriptive analyses. The third and fourth level codes are deployed only for the descriptive analysis. See the Appendix 2 for the code book.

Mayring (2002, pp. 144–148) formulates six general criteria for the assessment of qualitative research. The procedure description of the qualitative content analysis (criterion 1) is rendered in this chapter. The comprehensibility of interpretations (2) stems from the theoretical and empirical basis of the study from which categories were derived. The processing of the data (3) was systematic, consequent and followed rules established in previous projects. Closeness to the research object (4) is achieved by the informality, length, depth and setting of the interviews, whereby the language barrier at times emerged as a handicap that was overcome by rendering explanations and examples of the issues at hand. Regarding the communicative validity (5), the experts reviewed their own quotes and gave permission to use them, at times after some contextualization by the researcher. The final criterion is triangulation of results (6): in this study, the qualitative content analysis is complemented with salience analysis, ideal types and qualitative comparative analysis (see Appendix 4).

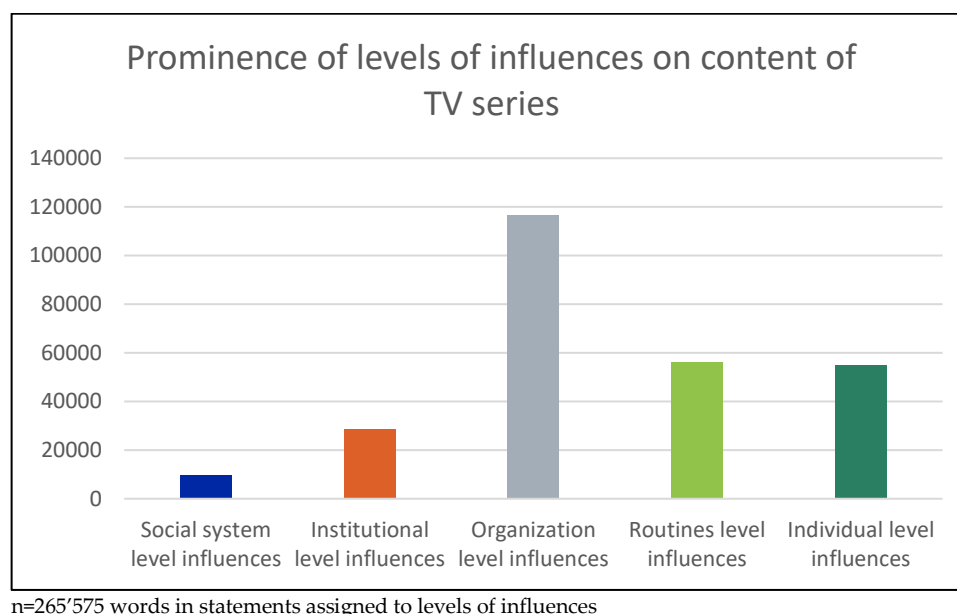
### III Results

## 9. The Creators' Perception of Influences on Content of TV Series

In this chapter, the findings on the creators' perception of influences on the content of their and others' TV series are presented. Firstly, the salience in the data of the five different levels of constraining and enabling influences is compared. In the following subchapters, the results are presented per level, whereby the attention is focused on the nature and strength of the constraining and enabling influences on the creation of TV series and on the inclusion of messages.

### 9.1. Prominence of Perceived Influences on Content

*Figure 8. Prominence of levels of influences on content of TV series*



The creators perceive most constraining and enabling factors of creation and inclusion of messages on the organization level. The manifold factors are investigated closer in the subchapter 9.5. The routines and individual level follow at some distance and are discussed in subchapters 9.6 and 9.7. Overall, the influences that are located within the organization outdo the organization-external influences: the social system and institutional levels of influences are (far) less prominent and are discussed in subchapters 9.3 and 9.4.

### 9.2. Salience of Perceived Constraining and Enabling Influences on TV Series

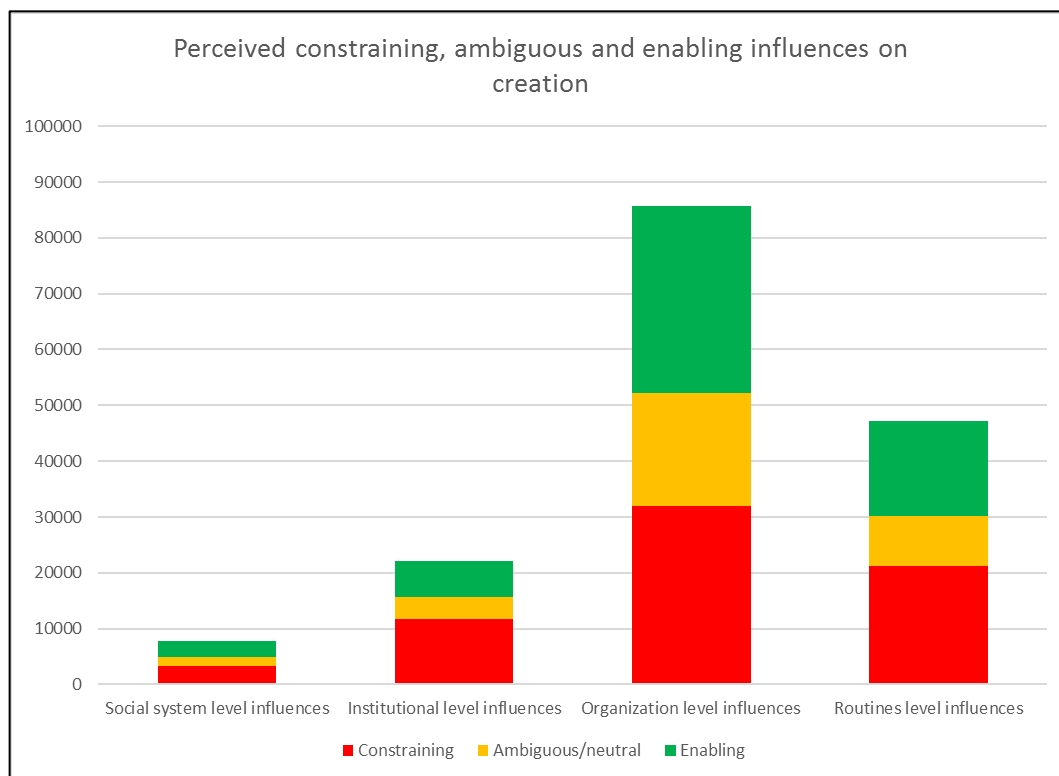
The importance of influences lies in the constraining and enabling effects they have on the creation of TV series and thus on the inclusion of elements regarded as



societally relevant by the creators. Figure 9 shows that constraints are slightly more salient than enabling influences. The highest number of words is dedicated to the constraints and enablers on the organization level, whereby the latter is somewhat more present than the former. On all other levels, the perceived curtailments are stronger than the creation-facilitating factors.

The individual level is omitted in Figure 9. The individual level influences pertain to the impact that the writers, producers and developers indicate to have on their own TV series and the influence they ascribe to other individual co-creators. These influences are the counterpart of the influences external to the individual creators discussed on the other levels. The individual influences are presented in subchapter 9.7.

*Figure 9. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling influences on creation in number of words in statements*



n=181'365 words in statements assigned to levels of influences

### **9.3. The Perceived Social System Level Influences on TV Series' Content**

#### **9.3.1. Introduction and Conceptual Factors**

The most macro level of the conceptual model "Hierarchy of Influences" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) is the social system level which consists of influences on content of TV series stemming from (the interplay between) cultural, ideological, political and economic subsystems. The subsystems entail - besides the institutions and personas whose concrete actions would be place able at the lower levels of the conceptual model – also the past and present discourses, argumentations, motives, behaviors and conventions of the realm. (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 8) see their "systemic level" consisting of influences of social, cultural and ideological contexts in which media workers function, so in which creators produce their TV series. Interviews might not be the best data collection method to find factors on this level: "Studying social forces as they are perceived by individuals can only account for influences that are consciously perceived as such" (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 18).

#### **9.3.2. Political Subsystem Influences**

##### **9.3.2.1. Partisan Media Politics and Interventionism**

Creators discuss constraints caused by political subsystems' influence and pressure on broadcasters and creators of TV series. Exemplifying features of the political parallelism in Italy, Arlanch explains the hurdles to making political drama. RAI is paid by the state (and the parties) and is traditionally a battleground for vested political interests. According to Careddu, political constraints on programming are of a structural nature in Italy:

"The channel 1 is always under what we can call the Vatican Influence. Not only do we have Don Matteo or Suor Angela, there is influence. The second channel is not socialist, because the socialists are dead in Italy. So it is more Lega Nord-Forza Italia, the right side! And the third is always more left side, more the communist party in some way. In Rai 3 there is a soap opera 'Un posto al sole' shot in Naples. (...). Also the broadcaster Mediaset [Canale 5] is political. Because the owner is Berlusconi."

About his series, Rocco Schiavone on the (supposed right-wing) channel RAI 2 Careddu says:

"A couple of politicians of the right side (...) say that it is incredible that in a public show [PSB series], the policeman smokes marijuana. But it is good advertisement for us. We hope that they will go on with parliamentary questions."

He states that, on Sky Italia, a series about politics is broadcasted but the series is set in the 90s. Andreatta, head of drama at RAI and responsible for fiction on all (main) RAI channels, denies current political influences on the fiction program: "In the 80s there was a much stronger political influence. Later the television channels of the

public service became specialized by target and editorial lines." At present, the tide seems to be turning again; the government of de facto premier and Mussolini admirer Salvini (Lega) nominated a disreputable right-wing journalist as head of RAI in autumn 2018. In addition, the government scrutinizes - in the fashion of autocratic regimes - the RAI program regularly.

The Belgian PSB content manager Janssen denies that any resistance of governments and (media) politicians to the portrayal in fiction of 'Flemish' identity as multi-cultural would have an impact: any interference "is micro-management. Our CEO will not let politics get so deep into the organization." Hermans adds, "Thus far we are quite independent. But..." Ahlgren says, "I haven't been working for political series, but I think you have to be very careful as a broadcaster." Gabold gives an example of the series *1864*:

"In Denmark 1864 was not a success, because we have a party here which is called Dansk Folkeparti, Danish people's party. They are like Front National in France. And they didn't like 1864 because [for] the catastrophe in 1864 we blamed the Danes, and the party thought it was awful."

About *Borgen*, Gabold says, the same party protested the advocacy of multi-culturalism by the main character, the fictional prime minister. Gram explains that political considerations influenced the writers (and content) of *Borgen*:

"DR was always seen as a central-left TV station, which I believe is not completely correct. But that is a political thing. Often in the episodes of the show, the labor leader is more of an antagonist than that guy from the extreme-right. And that we did very intentional."

Gram says that the point the creative team wanted to make with *Borgen* was establishing the value of democratic dialogue and reaching the largest possible audience. He insists that the policies at DR guarantee the freedom of expression of creators. Anticipatory obedience and self-censorship seem at various PSBs (Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Germany) relatively common to preclude political bias allegations.

### 9.3.2.2. Political-Ideological Zeitgeist

Creators see TV series as reflecting the political Zeitgeist in the sense that 'popular' instincts and sentiments are portrayed. Arlanch compares the idealistic portrayal of the liberal, humanitarian and sympathetic president in *The West Wing* to the ruthless, immoral and opportunistic president in *House of Cards*: "The president of the United States was (...) 15 year ago someone that everyone supported. Not anymore."

According to Careddu his main character *Rocco Schiavone* is in line with a political 'mood' among 'the Italians': "Because, especially in Italy, there is a wave of populism, people who think that everyone has their own laws and in some way he [the protagonist] has this kind of soul." Careddu finds that showing vigilantism is in itself not populist; it is just communicating common sentiments.

### 9.3.2.3. Socio-Cultural/Political Environment

Pertaining to the influences on the content of TV series stemming from the overlap of social, cultural and political subsystems some contours emerge. The Scandinavian creators are all largely convinced that the socio-cultural/political tradition in the region is reflected in the content of their series. Gabold is quite outspoken and claims that his series can only be made in Denmark, resp. Scandinavia. According to him, several plot twists and character traits are simply not translatable to other societal settings: "I couldn't do Borgen in Switzerland. I mean there would not be that kind of political stuff and that kind of woman." He does see rewarding topics for Swiss TV series: "It is so beautiful that you have plots with a man who is making clocks and watches." Also, in his new series, script elements would not function in countries with a different perception on gender roles than the ones 'common' in Denmark. Scherfig reasons in the same vein.

Grisoni and Smith see the social reality in the UK often captured in TV series. Kropf and colleagues confirm the same to an extent for Germany, where the more serious fiction tackles current issues. In Switzerland, a tradition of social critique in entertainment and fiction is not established, although there are plenty of societal issues to discuss, Alber thinks. She states that in *Der Bestatter* the creators try to incorporate several serious issues that then drifted somewhat far from any reality in Switzerland. Fischer finds the addressing of social questions in TV series lacking in urgency in contemporary Switzerland.

### 9.3.3. Cultural Subsystem Influences: Trends and Zeitgeist

#### 9.3.3.1. Cultural Trends

Beraud sees successful TV series being in tune with the widespread sentiment of the period:

"During the great depression, comedy was successful because people needed to laugh, needed to forget their worries. During the 60s television was about fantasy, because people were at a place where after the 50s, they were able to dream, and it was liberating to just go further."

Arlanch sees no socio-political or cultural background (e.g., manhood in crisis) to the prominence in prestigious series of the flawed male hero. Gylling relates the production style and content of Norwegian TV series to national culture and character traits that in turn are rooted in the natural environment. Deroche-Miles sees a long-term cultural pattern influencing high-end TV series:

"They are more violent and lack morality. There is a dissociation now between morality and esthetics, which has been around for quite a while. It started in literature about a century ago, in painting, in theatre, and it has been going on for an awful long time now."

Developer Andreatta of RAI describes how (high) culture is a direct source for TV series:

“We decided to try to find Italian cultural and literary properties that could be international. So, we are producing *The Medici*, history that is not only Italian, but of the Western world, *My Brilliant Friend* and *The Name of The Rose*”. (...). In our editorial strategy we want to find what in our identity can be universal.”

Popular noir and crime fiction (“from Camilleri to Maurizio De Giovanni, Carlo Lucarelli, Antonio Manzini, Alessia Gazzola, etc.”) are also turned into TV series, she adds.

### 9.3.3.2. Culture and Audience Needs

Creators link the varying (socio-) cultural characteristics of nations and regions to differing audience expectations of TV series. Wood states that the success of TV series is based on satisfying needs of (large groups of) viewers, more so than on portraying social reality:

“From the safety of your room, it gives you a frizz ante to be exposed to the underbelly of life. The success of all those Scandinavian series... as far as I know there is not one serial killer in whole Scandinavia”.

Deroche-Miles agrees and says that European audiences want to be titillated and even shocked: “It is possible to serve this sort of immorality and the absence of cohesion within a collectivity because you live in a society which is basically very safe.” She distinguishes, in

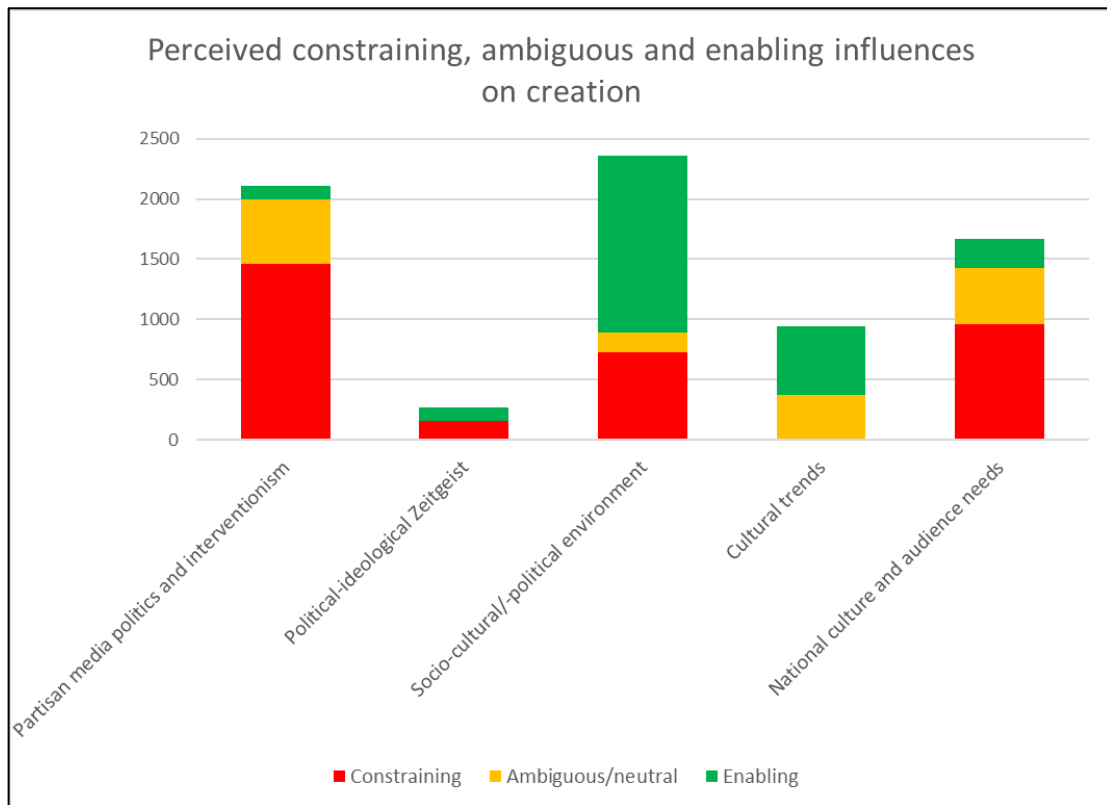
“Telenovelas, as a complete contrast, people want a representation of something which is safe, which is moral, where the good guy will be rewarded one way or the other after being thrashed. (...). That doesn’t exist anymore in modern high-end series. (...). The immoral series is directed towards young people in a civilization which is totally different from (...) South America or India or Turkey. (...). There they are not certain that their rights will be respected, women are not treated properly, wealth...”

The creators of *Der Bestatter* feel that the audience can identify with the mid-Switzerland setting of the series: an ordinary, slightly sedated, and decidedly not cosmopolitan, hip or beautified environment and atmosphere.

### 9.3.4. Overview: Perceived Social System Level Influences

The constraining and enabling influences on the social system level are quantified based on the total words in the statements. The results are presented in Figure 10. In addition, a brief overview is rendered in a box with bullet points.

*Figure 10. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling social system level influences on creation in number of words in statements*



n=9'695 words in statements assigned to the social system level of influences

#### **Political subsystem**

- Socio-cultural and-political environment and storytelling traditions are most salient and predominantly perceived as enabling
- Political-ideological Zeitgeist can enable or constrain
- Political interventions constrain creation and mediation
- Creators practice anticipatory obedience and self-censoring under pressure

#### **Cultural subsystem**

- Cultural characteristics and trends impact content, enable messages of TV series
- Trends in the arts surface in (high-end) TV series: amorality and counter-esthetics
- National cultural and social facets reflect in audience demands of TV fiction and constrain

- Amorality and titillation in demand in 'safe' countries; moralistic treatments in 'unstable' countries

## 9.4. The Perceived Social Institution Level Influences on TV Series' Content

### 9.4.1. Introduction and Conceptual Factors

In line with Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 99), the production of TV series' content is in this part of the analysis understood as a homogenous practice, to be able to discuss influences that impact all production of series. (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) name the following as influencing factors at the institutional level: (1) the changing media landscape and proliferation of platforms, (2) media sources, (3) interest groups, (4) media watchdog groups, (5) inter-media influences, (6) media education, (7) regulations and state control, (8) media policy, and (9) institutional relationships with corporate elites and financial institutions.

Some of these conceptual factors are salient in the data of this study: the media (TV series) landscape is very prominently discussed and the evidence is presented in the first subchapters. The factors media sources, interest groups, inter-media influences, media regulation, and media policy impact specific projects and/or organizations in terms of material for series<sup>8</sup>, lobbying attempts, influences of/on film and internet dissemination, audience restrictions, state funding of TV series and political influences on PSBs, respectively. The general influences of these factors are briefly discussed in this chapter. The factor relationships with corporate elites and financial institutions pertains here to financing of TV series and is an important topic throughout all chapters. Media watchdogs and media education are not discussed by the interviewees.

The categories of influences that concern all discussed projects, in addition to the TV series landscape and market, are costs and dependency on financing, advertising, audiences and media policy.

It must be noted that the abstract nature of (some of) the industry-encompassing factors placeable at this conceptual level of influences might prevent the interviewed creators from acknowledging them. The factors are perhaps overseen, viewed as a given and always present, and are thus not a matter to discuss in a conversation about the creator's specific product.

### 9.4.2. The TV Series Landscape

The dramatic changes in the TV series landscape of the last decades, as sketched in the literature review, also resonate strongly in the interviews with the creators. Creators believe the format TV series to be thriving. Careddu says, "I think that we

<sup>8</sup> The fact that creators are media sources for TV series of broadcasters is discussed in detail in the next subchapters.

are going to a world that needs stories. (...). It is easier to watch a series than read a book, I think there is a growing market." Gylling also finds that watching series replaces reading. Gabold sees cinema, despite the occasional blockbuster, squashed under pressure from the offer of serial fiction. Winger finds series no longer at the bottom of the suppliers' prestige ranking, behind cinema and TV film, but at the top of it. Smith explains the status and attraction of TV series:

"The big Hollywood people are producing such rubbish. (...). In the mainstream films there is very little experimentation or interest. A lot of great writers and actors and producers are migrating to television, where they can express themselves in a more intelligent, literate way."

Interviewees point at the proliferation of platforms for serial fiction and the increased demand for products. Writers interpret the developments positively; they see a much larger market for TV series emerging the last decade(s) in Europe. Scherfig says, "as a writer you have more options now to offer new things to different people. Like HBO Nordic, Netflix, DR, TV 2." Ahlgren emphasizes the demand for original content and Careddu confirms this for the Italian market. Østerbye and Gylling believe that with the large choice of broadcasters the influence of creators on content in principle increases. The creators are relieved from fitting the content of series toward a specific channel, time slot and audience, as was the case in the not so distant past, says Wood.

The interviewees discuss the reasons for the entry of new players on the European TV series market. Van Passel observes that not only are streaming services investing in series in Europe, but also are film companies expanding into the field. He provides reasons: "we always thought that non-English drama never travels around the world but now suddenly it does, and everybody is profiting from that." Gallagher sees (illegal) file sharing as an incentive for streaming services: "As people find ways to steal the content, then it behooves the content producers to find ways to monetize that audience." Respondents saw in 2016 few revolutionary developments in the German market: the pay-TV players were not very active in producing original content. Since then, the German pay-TV (co-) productions *Babylon Berlin* (ARD, SKY), *Dark* (Netflix) and several other high-end series have been released or are in development at pay-TV providers.

### **9.4.3. Market Developments**

Wood sees additional big players entering the TV series market and substituting the traditional players. The (new) pay-TV suppliers are in an advantaged position on the market. Gabold sees a more exact audience targeting emerging, whereby the streaming services have the upper hand. Widmer observes that targeting and servicing exact-defined niches represents a strong competitive gain for the streaming services.

Gram, Scherfig, Schweizer and others see the market shares of the PSB series under pressure from new players. Scherfig points to the Netflix strategy of producing



local content and competing with the national broadcasters. Wood is gloomy about the traditional suppliers of series:

“A very successful guy went to the BBC to present his new series called *The Royals*. They absolutely went white when he told them what Netflix is going to give him for it. It was the first time the BBC recognized that they would not be able to compete. He was given a hundred million by Netflix and the total BBC drama budget is like a 105”.

The only option for BBC to successfully compete is not in high-end drama anymore but in low-cost innovative series like *The Office*. The competition for the scarce talent with a track record cannot be won by the traditional broadcasters of series.

Hermans sees innovation and introducing new concepts to the audience as the solution to the increased competition. Grotenhuis sees the most watched (ad-based) channel losing viewers by not adapting to the new competition and offering outdated fiction formats with always the same characters and stories. Deroche-Miles sees the traditional broadcasters adapting by presenting increasingly conservative content to secure their remaining market shares, a destitute strategy. Ramosino says:

“It seems that the essential part of a project is that you create something that can go on Facebook, but in two to three years it is going to be different. It is difficult to understand if this is really important or what is going to be important in three years. Because you run the risk to lose yourself with all the different options.”

Mayor is not pessimistic about the future of traditional suppliers and thinks the proliferation of platforms offers the chance of audience segmentation with the exploitation chain of TV series. Arlanch sees new platforms inducing new formats, but he does not believe that traditional TV will be cannibalized: “They will survive together, and they will influence each other. I’ve heard many times that TV is dead. But normal TV is alive and happy”.” Andreatta feels that public service is the flywheel of the Italian TV fiction industry: “Pay-TV makes 6% of what is produced in Italy and RAI makes 70%. (...). They make two or three series per year while we make 30 projects per year.”

A surge in supply of TV series is the reaction to the increased demand, and respondents observe the consequences of what is seen as over-production. Berggren finds that it becomes harder to find an audience for the produced series. Within a few minutes, the viewers decide whether something is worth pursuing further. Beraud elaborates:

“With 400 series in America alone, the great series sometimes are being ignored because people cannot find them in the mass (...). You’re competing with Netflix and others, and even with series from the past. It is a harder and harder business.”

Terjung points to all the different ways to consume TV series and Schweizer mentions the increased use of internet-based players to catch-up on TV series, which enlarges the already wide choice further. Van Passel feels: “There are too many production companies, too many shows. In Europe, the available budget should be spent on fewer approaches to raise the quality, to give an answer to the American TV

series.” Wood thinks that broadcasters need to diversify their offer: “It is the series and not the brand of the channel [that attracts an audience].” However, Gram states that it is increasingly difficult to stand out in the general TV series’ market: “There are so many TV shows competing for attention, if you want a show to be greenlit, it has to be quite unique or scandalous.”

#### **9.4.4. TV Series’ Costs and Dependency on Financiers**

The respondents emphasize the dependency on financiers and the subsequent imbalance in leverage over content of TV series. Wännström condenses the opinion of many creators: “Financiers automatically have a lot of power over TV series. It is bad for the content.”

The dependency on financiers is enhanced by inflation of costs of the realization of TV series. Berggren and several other creators (Gabold, Alber, Scherfig) complain about the strong costs-increase in the industry. Inflation is caused by the large demand for (high-end) products at broadcasters and audiences alike, by the increased competition between well-endowed international companies pursuing high production values, by personnel expenses, and some cyclical as well as structural factors. Gabold claims producers of TV series lately consider hiring expensive stars as an entry way to financing. Grisoni laments the copying of American-style productions (and corresponding budgets) in the UK and Europe.

On the side of potential financiers, problems arise. The resources available for TV series at the traditional broadcasters are decreasing. The budgets of PSB for fiction are under siege, as described in the literature review and many ad-based broadcasters face decreasing revenues. Gabold says, “I had the money for producing 40 one-hour-episodes of *The Killing*. But there is not that much money anymore.” Gylling remarks that the remuneration of writers is equal to 2005, despite a ‘booming’ market.

Several interviewees invest hope for the future of the TV series business in the market entry of additional well-funded players such as telecom companies looking for content to position their carriers (Fischer, Wood). British Telecom tried, but failed miserably at producing TV series, says Wood. Gabold predicts a life span of one more decade for broadcasting. Afterwards, only powerful suppliers of prized content will remain as financiers of the format formerly known as TV series.

Creators describe several currently practiced remedies to the high costs of TV series. Tax reduction or exemption for national TV and film fiction endeavors is to some degree established in most countries. State subsidies awarded by (semi-) independent institutions are in several countries an additional source for financing of TV series. In Belgium, the media fund only consents to investment if a broadcaster is on board with the product as well and thus, the chance of broadcasting of the finalized product is heightened (Van Passel, Janssen). Van Passel says, “In one sense it is a good system because it gives the producer a little bit more weight in the balance. The broadcaster can’t go directly to that fund, only the producer of the

series.” In addition, Grotenhuis mentions subsidies by a Dutch national fund for audiovisual fiction.

Respondents discuss another solution to the inflated costs of series: international co-productions (and co-financing) are a current trend. Some of the discussed products (*The Bridge*, *Rita*, *The Team*, *Borgen*, *The Killing*, *Real Humans*, *Follow the Money*, *Elven*, *The Medici*, *My Brilliant Friend*) of PSBs and ad-based broadcasters are co-financed and-produced whereby, in some cases, many partners are involved, while at other products two or three broadcasters partake. Fitze describes the process of co-production (of *The Team*) as troublesome. The influence on content and production facets is divided across several partners with at times devastating results. Other respondents are not negative about co-production and -financing, but they admit that the decision-making on content becomes highly complex (Ahlgren, Ramosino).

#### **9.4.5. Advertising**

Advertising concerns are not an issue for most creators. Only the behaviors of ad-based broadcasters are a topic and the influences on content are debated in the next subchapters.

Mayor deliberates on a future with strongly decreased advertising revenue:

“I think two or three years from now the people will be even freer to watch whenever they want. So, the market share will be something else. But we have one third of our means coming from advertising. So, we have to solve those problems.”

Other creators consider advertising in the light of new platforms:

“We are also aiming to new profiles on the market to sell our stories to. When we develop series, we don’t only think anymore of the commercial and public networks, but we also think of Viceland or Amazon or Netflix and short content, Youtube and Facebook even. And then you need to narrow your audience to think what kind of advertisement would be on this particular platform and to whom we could sell it to.”

#### **9.4.6. Audiences**

Creators and experts discuss the audience for audio-visual fiction in terms of co-existence versus substitution on the market of distribution technologies, media types and platforms. Wood sees, among the younger audiences Youtube-type platforms by far outdoing the demand for TV series. Online viewing will increase further, and the creators need to thoroughly adapt their products to it.

The influence on TV series’ content of the audiences’ consumption patterns is a topic in the interviews. The audience preference for platforms and suppliers obviously influences the market, but for the actual composition of content also binge-watching must be taken into consideration, as Mosholt and Petronio indicate pertaining to their work for Netflix. The streaming service practices audience targeting and focuses on continued engagement of viewers. The latter is done (also)

by specific storytelling: “They asked us as writers to increase the attention and the cliff-hangers” (Petronio). Also, Berggren adapts the writing to binge-watching. Wood observes that the tendency to release all episodes of a series simultaneously is getting less strong because it is not sustainable for the creators and the supplier, as the week-by-week release by Netflix of *Better Call Saul* demonstrates.

An entirely different aspect discussed by some creators, is the perceived public discourse and the current opinions of the (construct) audience. These exercise influence on content, usually by way of interference by the broadcaster liaison. Content manager Janssen evaluates the political trends and advocates an opportunistic approach:

“At the moment, we have more a right-orientated society, it shifts every five to ten years. Drama takes two or three years to make. If you are going to tell a story that is completely left-wing, then you probably will not get your audience.”

This sincerely formulated consideration constrains messages in TV series’ content strongly.

#### **9.4.7. Media Policy**

National media policies directly influence the content of TV series. The omnipresent budget cuts at PSBs cause a drive towards producing fewer series and/or episodes of a series. Deroche-Miles sees serial storytelling under siege because of budget cuts. In the UK, almost exclusively mini-series are produced for the BBC in the realm of serious drama, says Deroche-Miles. This reduces the narrative space for messages.

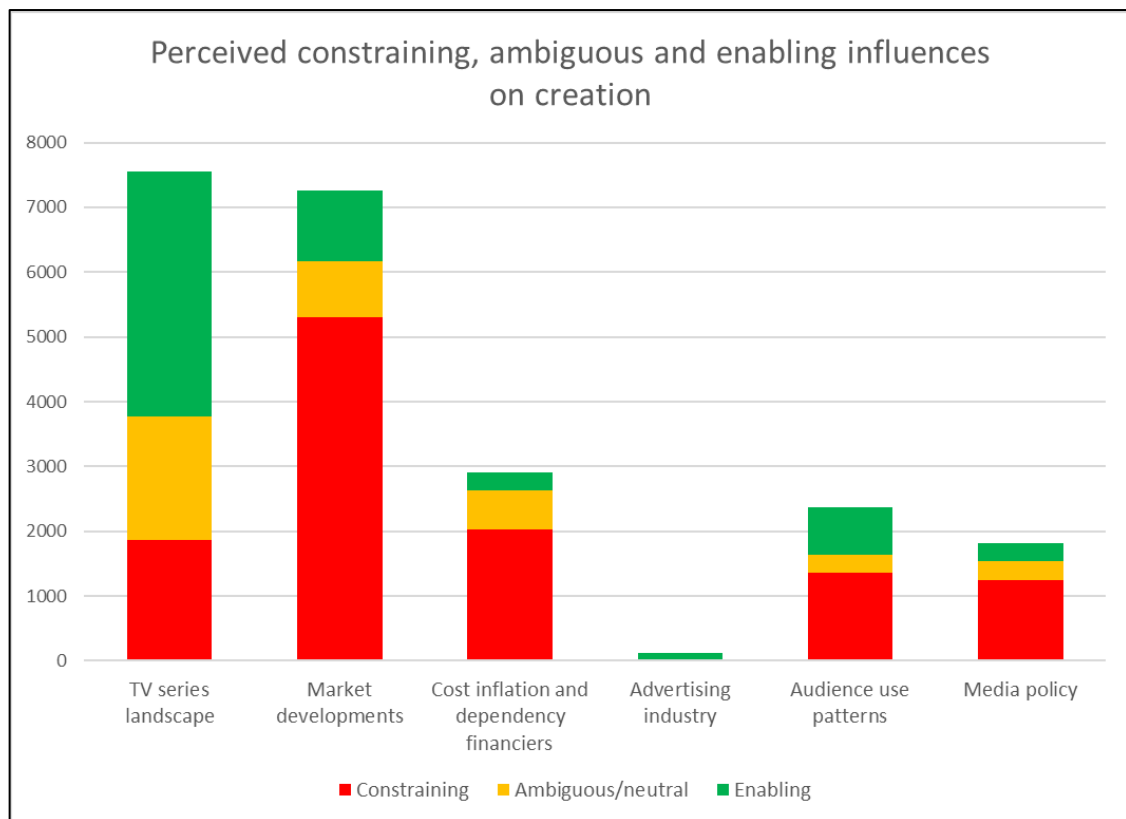
Media content regulations are not a salient issue. Grisoni elaborates: “There is a whole compliance thing. The lawyers run name checks, all kind of things. (...). In Southcliffe, one character has this amazing stream of racist invective. And there was a brief question or two about that.” Terjung and Berggren are aware of the official regulations. Nevertheless, the broadcaster issued reprimands and conflicts arose with the military, respectively.

Political balance and “objectivity” (Mayor) are the prize PSBs must pay for being subsidized. Self-censorship shines through in her words: “It can be critical, but then it must be balanced. Of course, we are in Switzerland, so most of the time people like it like that.”

#### **9.4.8. Overview: Perceived Social Institution Level Influences**

In Figure 11, the constraining and enabling influences on the social institution level are quantified. An overview of perceived influences at the social institution level I provide in bullet points in the box.

Figure 11. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling social institution level influences on creation in number of words in statements



n=22'049 words in statements assigned to the social system level of influences

- TV series thrive in media landscape
- Market growth, increased demand → (potentially) more influence of creators on the content
- New powerful players influence industry, streaming services have competitive advantage
- Pressure on traditional broadcasters: loss of revenues, budget cuts → fewer and shorter series
- Production output of pay-TV is important, but not yet large in Europe
- Global industry/market: over-production → finding an audience is difficult for TV series
- Increasing production costs and dependency on financiers constrains influence of creators on content of their series
- Audience use patterns disadvantage the main (traditional) suppliers on the national markets
- Cost reduction strategies are established → compromise required, loss of influence of creators

## **9.5. The Perceived Organization Level Influences on TV Series' Content**

### **9.5.1. Introduction and Conceptual Factors**

The type of organization that is mostly referred to in the interviews is the creator's customer in the market of production of TV series. This client can be the broadcaster, the distributor, or a production company. Several respondents are employed by a broadcaster or a production company and discuss their own organization.

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) list as organization-related factors that influence media content: (1) ownership, (2) membership, (3) mandates, goals, (4) policies, goals, actions, rules, (5) interactions with other organizations, (6) bureaucratic structure, (7) economic viability and stability, (8) target audiences, and (9) influence from advertisers.

The factors (3) mandates, goals, (4) policies, (6) bureaucratic structure, (8) target audiences, and (9) advertisers' influence feature (prominently) in the interviews. The evidence of the listed conceptual factors is cross-sectioned with categories emerging in the data: general perception of influences of organizations; business models; goals and mandates; power, control and policies; budgets; market competition; defined target audiences; advertisers.

Regarding the other, less prominent factors, on factor (1) ownership, Danish writer Gram states that the public is owner of the PSB and consequently he ought to supply the general audience. Aside from a mention of Berlusconi being the owner of Mediaset, influencing the editorial line of channels and their fiction offer, no other evidence emerges. Ownership is not discussed as a factor of influence on content.

The factor (2) membership is, interpreted as creators either being employed or being hired by organizations, an aspect that is discussed pertaining to the influence of the organization, status and remuneration of the creators. Writers in the service of broadcasters (from Denmark) acknowledge the large influence of their organizations and interpret this positively. The external writers describe either a productive or a contentious relation with the broadcasters, and several mention having manifold problems with the influence of the organizations on the content of their work. Developers and producers are almost always employees of the broadcaster or of the production company and reflect thus on their own organization. The influence of the organization is then positively assessed.

Factor (5), interaction with other organizations, is not a highly salient influence on content of TV series. The co-production of TV series is necessary to the developers Hermans and Andreatta and is appreciated by writers that work(ed) on series co-financed by different broadcasters, like Østerbye, Berggren, and others. Ramosino and Arlanch see large advantages in the international co-production of originally Italian scripts or novels. Arlanch does not object to adaptations of the content to make it accessible to different national audiences, like 'classical Roman' characters speaking English. Scherfig acknowledges the dangers for content from co-

production, but none of the 17 partners (aggregated in groups by the creators) felt they completely 'owned' the series *The Bridge*. Streaming services (Amazon, Netflix) sometimes pick up series discontinued by the original broadcasters, which creators naturally evaluate positively. Deroche-Miles sees co-production in Scandinavia as positive but calls the British reluctant towards collaborating internationally. Mayor argues why the co-production with French companies had to stop: the influence on content was not satisfactory to the French-speaking Swiss PSB. Fitze sees advantages in co-financing in exchange for syndication rights of the product.

Co-production is described as at times complicated, troublesome and/or counterproductive by e.g., Widman, Van Passel and Fitze. Van Passel thinks any positive effect is ironed out "by having to take so many people in the crew." Some respondents call *The Team* a disastrous example of a partnership. The project is better evaluated by PSB employees Lüthi and Hermans.

The factor (7) economic viability remains mainly in the background in discussions on budgets of TV series. Some respondents (Fischer, Petronio) state that the financial potency of organizations like PSBs and Netflix facilitates the realization of projects, has (positive) consequences for the quality and success chances of the creators' product, if not for their fees. Deroche-Miles points to the opulent budgets of US giants. For European broadcasters, it is different. A lack of budget is neutrally assessed by some respondents pertaining to ad-based TV organizations. The Norwegian creator of *Elven*, Berggren, explains how he managed by strict management, planning and adaption of the script and the locations to produce a crime story for far lower costs than normal. He supplied a marginally endowed ad-based broadcaster, and states: "our goal was to deliver the series for far lower costs, to show it is possible." The financial situation in the media industries is in general not advantageous to the creation of TV series. Writer Gylling states she was not paid for working on projects during the financial crisis, because the broadcasters did not pay the production companies. Deroche-Miles also regards the financial situation of many broadcasters as a negative factor in the production of series:

"The British produce a lot of miniseries. And it is not because viewers are bored. They just haven't got enough money to keep on producing forever. The good series that we use to have in the past, they tend to be reduced to five or three episodes: really not enough to develop anything on any format."

### **9.5.2. Perception of Influences of Organizations**

Respondents know that they produce, in essence, for an organization with specific features and characteristics. Berggren says, "basically, as a producer, your direct target audience is the people who make the decisions at the channel." On a very general level, it is not surprising that having a project financed and disseminated by a powerful broadcaster is positive and an advantage over cooperation with smaller organizations.

The decision-making process on the part of the broadcasters pertaining to the greenlighting of TV series is an important topic. Some creators explain in detail how their projects ventured through the greenlighting stages at the broadcaster. In overview, the initiative for a project can come from creators (writers, producers) who pitch a concept (from an idea to a full script for several episodes or a season) to broadcasters and production companies (this trajectory is most often mentioned for the UK, Italy, and the Low Countries). The broadcaster can engage in semi-public tendering for ideas and outlines and organize a knockout competition (a “tennis tournament,” Terjung calls it) whereby per round the qualifying scripts are developed further, until a few are left to be finalized (in Switzerland and Germany). At times, creators are asked to create concepts or scripts for a specific channel, time-slot, genre, or to adapt existing material, novels, stories, or are asked to ‘fix’ scripts of series (all countries). As a form of internal recruitment and maintenance of the house brand, co-writers on series can be promoted to pitching their own series and then (possibly) realizing it (Scandinavia, Switzerland). The process of development and realization of TV series can thus be instigated by all sides. However, the chances of realization of proposed projects are higher where the broadcaster initiates the project.

The process of greenlighting always consists of multiple phases, is lengthy, complex and can be, depending on the organization as well as the involved personalities, nontransparent, tedious and conflict-ridden. At some prematurely aborted projects, the interviewees assess the greenlighting process very negatively and ridicule it. Several organizations evaluate pilots and first episodes in-depth. PSB head of fiction, Fitze, explains that the executive board of the PSB watched the pilot of *Der Bestatter*. The main female role was re-casted after evaluation of the pilot. Kropf expresses severe doubts; market research showed positive results on a pilot of other writers, and then the series completely flopped at the actual audience. Currently, the development process is different, he adds.

Regarding the match of content of their series to (the brand of) a broadcaster, some respondents see no distinctions between the organizations (e.g., Wännström); their product would fit (almost) anywhere. For others, the considerations about the potential client-organizations exercise in most cases an influence already in the early writing and development stages:

“The advertising business model is leaking, and they don’t have an answer yet. We producers and directors want to make an original show, but that is expensive and a risk for them. I did not want to accept their development money as long as I wasn’t sure that the show that we were developing was going to be accepted by them” (Van Passel).

A fair share of the creators (implicitly) shows a lot of understanding for the considerations of the commissioning organization. *Rita* writer Østerbye explains her actions after a US broadcaster bought her script: “ABC is not cable, so it is very family oriented and basically we rewrote the premise and all the sexual things have been taken out, so it is more the kiddy version.” Ahlgren says, “We’re very aware of it [i.e. the preferences of the broadcaster].” Widman agrees:



“As a creator, it is almost impossible to have the ambition to cover all channels. You have to know which is the main channel, for whom are we working? It is a difference if it is Sky or Canal Plus or SVT in Sweden.”

Irlé reflects on what content can be expected from which types of organizations:

“It is very different if you’re working for a cable where you know the people are already your clients or your fans. And this is even truer with Netflix and Amazon. And we are producing for a PSB, a network, so we should be compared to the people who are producing Dr. House, Greys Anatomy. It is not only the slot, it is also the type of distributor you work for.”

The streaming services have the upper hand in decision-making on series, because of extensive and immediate information on consumers, Irlé feels.

Smith thinks only in a second phase about which channel would be the best fit for his product and relates this to the length of episodes (“three times one hour: BBC, six half-hour episodes: Channel 4”). In addition, on advice of the prospective broadcaster Channel 4, he started conceptualizing his series slightly more as a black comedy instead of a drama. For *One Night*, he did not want commercial breaks, thus he did not consider ITV and Channel 4.

The marketing and promotion of the creators’ products by broadcasters is less of a topic than expected. Some of the interviewees are positively surprised by the efforts and resonance (Grisoni for *Red Riding*, Petronio for *Suburra*). Irlé sees advantages in working for a PSB: audience size, budget, marketing, and advertising are highly satisfactory, he feels.

### 9.5.3. Business Models

The influences of the business model of the commissioning organization (usually the broadcaster) is a very prominent topic in the interviews.

Producer/writer Ahlgren worked for organizations of all types and sees no difference in influences on content. Mosholt, however, does distinguish:

“When you’re making a series for TV 2 or DR, you know that you’re making a series for as wide an audience as possible. And I mean that creates like a form that you’re working in. Whereas with this show we did for Netflix we knew that we will be doing a show for primarily a young adults’ target group.”

Ramosino compares development processes:

“I think that you can’t write in the same way if you think of a project for RAI or Sky or Netflix. (...). RAI has a certain pace in doing things, a certain way of developing, whereas Sky has a longer period of development because they might want a show, but they develop it for 5 years before going into production.”

Mediaset is similar to RAI, Arlanch thinks. Regarding societally relevant topics, he observes:

“The fundamental values of democracy and tolerance are present at every RAI, Mediaset and Sky offer. There are marginal differences in what they think is more important: religious figures, different forms of families. It is more a matter of taste and what the view of the world of the head is.”

Because of audience size, Arlanch prefers to work for RAI and Mediaset. Grotenhuis also compares along business models:

“For public networks you need to have some sort of social relevance in what you make and for commercial network not, it should just be entertaining. (...). The fun thing in working for commercial networks is their decisiveness; (...) they are fast. The dark side of it is that you never have enough time for development, and that’s something where the public network is particularly strong, the development side.”

Van Passel prefers working for the Belgian PSB, because they allow a slower narration tempo than the series on the ad-based channel that must constantly induce viewers to return after the ad. He connects the quality of Scandinavian series to their inception at a PSB. Scherfig states that the ad-based channel in Denmark cannot finance the kind of quality produced at the PSB. Gylling sketches bad experiences, but thinks that it is not the business model, but rather the people deciding at the organizations that make the difference regarding processes and, ultimately, the quality of a series.

An interviewee who mainly worked for ad-based TV finds that the Danish PSB DR is incestuous, producing expensive soap operas with film school graduates. Berggren says the decision-making at PSB is tedious, whereas the ad-based channel he produces for is fast, cooperative and open to content ideas. NRK rejected his series concept “as usual” after longwinded deliberations and the ad-based channel consented on the spot in an informal coffee shop meeting after seeing a 15-minute pilot. Terjung says, “both ad-based channels as well as PSBs want to have good ratings. (...). I don’t understand the obsession with ratings at PSBs, they don’t need it really; they are financed anyway.”

Respondents compare the decision-making trajectory along business models. Mosholt says:

“I actually think that working with Netflix and working with DR is like closer together than working for TV 2 [ad-based channel]. Both are one-stop shops, one broadcaster. You deal with very few people. (...). So it is easier to get the freedom to actually do what you believe in. Because you don’t have that many people that you need to please along the way”.

Regarding content, “there are some specific genres and things that you (...) won’t be able to do on DR or TV 2. Because they need to reach this wide audience in a very small country.” Andreatta reasons along the same lines and distinguishes between the policies of the organizations. A Scandinavian interviewee states,

“At Netflix, there would be three or four people that read your stuff. At TV 2, it is really hard to know, because you have an editor, and the editor has a head of drama and the drama department has a head of..., so it goes up the whole system.”

### 9.5.3.1. Advertising-Based TV

In the literature, the manifold constraining influences on content exercised by ad-based broadcasters, due to, simply put, advertisers' influence and corresponding focus on mainstream, large audiences and ratings are discussed. A Scandinavian writer says on premature cancelation of series by an ad-based broadcaster, "If there aren't [instantly] many viewers they won't make any more seasons of a show."

Grotenhuis explains:

"RTL [an ad-based channel] says that their audience is 32 years old women with family, who know what they want in life and work. RTL averages their audience to do their programs. If they ask me to develop a drama series, it had better be about a 32 years old blond woman. Another [ad-based] network asked me for the Dutch equivalent of *Dexter*, with anti-heroes and serial killers. Then they say it is too dark, so they don't know what they are asking for."

Producer Winger calls his series an exception: the large degree of creative freedom that the production team experienced was at the time exceptional in ad-based TV. He says that it has become more common of late. Terjung sketches a high volatility of the decisions:

"SAT1 wanted 13 episodes as fast as possible, so that the series can establish itself in the audience market. Then they turn around and say, oh this other series failed, now we want a film first, and if it is successful, we do market research and then we decide. Or we make four episodes first and see. It changes all the time. You have to deal with it."

Van Passel saw his (horror-influenced) series rejected by the new head of fiction at the ad-based broadcaster, because of audience considerations. A Scandinavian writer says:

"TV 2 has a hard time in understanding material where something is at stake, because it makes them uncomfortable, they want things that are comfortable. But you can't write about things that are comfortable because they are not interesting. It is a dilemma."

She adds that the PSB would have liked the script she proposed. Gallagher laments an ad-based broadcaster: "You don't invent diseases in a medical show and then invent cures for the disease you've invented. But the broadcaster saw no problem in falsifying the science."

It stands to note that the respondents supplying advertising-based channels acknowledge the organization's influence, but do not all complain about unduly strong constraints. Writer Gallagher generally accepts the authority of his client. Wännström states that she had large freedom in the creation of her series yet describes several interventions. Mosholt received very few interfering notes on *Rita*. Ramosino points to ad-based channels adapting their fiction strategies by hiring writers as developers. Ahlgren sees advantages in working for ad-based channels as well because of their intensive audience targeting and research.

### 9.5.3.2. Public Service Broadcasters

An obvious difference to findings in US-American studies is the prominence of public service broadcasting in the creation of TV series in Europe and Quebec. PSBs employ or commission over half of the respondents in the sample and are attested strong direct influences on the content of TV series. In most cases, PSBs not only broadcasted the series, but also (co-) financed and (co-) produced it. The Danish PSB DR emerges in the interviews as leaving a legacy in the European TV series industry. Mosholt praises DR exuberantly:

“We’re all standing on the shoulders of especially the big DR. I think, what DR has done to Scandinavian drama is just amazing, at least from a creative standpoint. If it was not for the DR series, I don’t think I would be doing what I do today.”

He emphasizes the influence of the PSB serial fiction achievements to this day. Gram and Scherfig also emphasize the influence of DR, its record of accomplishment, policies and ‘dogmas’ regarding production and content, and its success. Gabold describes the large influence he had on behalf of his PSB, the Danish DR, on all facets of the product, including the content.

Several Swiss and Belgian respondents describe the cooperation of PSBs and workshops on creation of TV series with representatives of DR fiction. Many others (from the UK, Italy, and Germany) refer to Scandinavian successes and specific features of the DR production strategy (e.g., ‘one vision’ ought to permeate the series), and content (e.g., a ‘double story’, a societally relevant second plot is included next to the main story arch).

Respondents discuss the greenlighting and the exercise of control by PSBs. The German-Swiss PSB exerts complete control over the content of a crime series. The French-Swiss PSB exclusively realizes series with external independent creators. The influence of the latter PSB on content is somewhat less direct than in the German-Swiss case: the PSB finances and supervises at a distance from the composition of content. The idea is not to temper with unique creative visions, concludes Mayor.

The influence of broadcasters is strong in the other countries as well. The ‘controllers’ (developers, commissioners) of the BBC carry a lot of weight after a project has been approved. Two English writers (Grisoni and Smith) mention the potentially contentious relationship between the creators of a series and the (all too powerful) PSB delegates. Gabold refuses to develop for the BBC due to “excessive” control. Widman and Ahlgren attest the Swedish PSB strong influence on the content of their series, as does a writer who paints a bleak picture of the decision-making outcome at PSBs. Ramosino acknowledges a strong influence but does not observe any restriction of content other than on sex and violence at certain time slots and on product placement.

PSB developer Hermans says about societally relevant topics in their series: “It should feel like the natural story. (...) It makes you think about stuff in society. But it

is not a condition for producing something.” Content manager at the Flemish PSB Janssen is stricter:

“For us, a public broadcaster it is important to be relevant, that you tell relevant stories in nowadays life of our audience. (...). It is important is that we show the Flemish identity. It is where we are in the world, where we are in Belgium, (...) how we approach love, religion, politics, and hope. (...) That is really important for our viewers to relate. That you have all kind of ethnicities. (...). When you put your story in nowadays life, then you have to get all these things into your story.”

Grotenhuis argues in the same vein about PSBs: “It is true to say that especially VPRO and BNN [PSB channels] naturally connect to these [societally relevant] stories we like to tell.” Ramosino paints a less defined picture for the PSB in Italy: “they like you to talk about things but usually they are not suggesting what you put in a show. You have to present, they say yes or no.” She sees RAI inclined to adapt literature classics and thinks it is a good way to integrate immigrants by showing Italian culture in a popular way. Scherfig elaborates about DR pertaining to *The Bridge*:

“In Scandinavia, we have a tradition about making society criticism in our crime stories. Our crime stories are not just crime stories. (...). The broadcasters encouraged us to have (...) the ‘double story’ (...). You can’t just be entertaining; you always have to have this element of what’s going on in the world right now.”

Mayor says her PSB looks for realism. The inclusion of societally relevant content can occur at BBC 1 for example in ‘soaps’ with necessary reflections on society, as Deroche-Miles states, and in content for niche audiences open to innovative forms, contents and relevant messages, e.g., at BBC 2, Channel 4.

The influence of public service broadcasters is always described as very strong. It produces contrasting results regarding the innovation of content and formats of TV series. “This cost so much money; this has to go into the main program (...). That’s why our series tend to be a bit more timid, more conservative, because they have to perform (...) for a very wide audience” (Fitze). For one thing, the PSB influence thus exercises a strong restraining influence on content. Irlé is aware of the constraints of mainstream audiences. A Scandinavian writer observes similar problems and laments the lack of courage at DR,

“a public service broadcaster should take more chances. They are fixed on ratings but totally don’t need to be. Most of the money goes towards these very big and very expensive productions. (...). I wish they would make two or three shows a year, which are half the prize (...). The middle-class in a realistic setting is been what DR has been doing.”

She describes a lack of responsiveness at the PSB. Mayor states the PSB has the task to innovate but is also supposed to appease a core audience perceived as predominantly old, nonurban and conservative.

At PSBs, a willingness to greenlight more challenging forms and topics is made out, when catering to channels with a different target audience, as Smith professes about his early career in comedy: “BBC took chances on weird stuff.” He says: “I

think Channel 4 and BBC2 are still the most experimental and adventurous.” Hermans confirms: “Commercial stations maybe do not dare to do it in the first years. If they see that we [the PSB] step in it, then maybe we open up for a new genre also at the commercial stations.”

High-end fiction is so costly that the motivation to produce series is often described as other than economic. For a PSB, interviewees note, presenting critically acclaimed high-quality fiction signifies a “calling card,” says Grisoni. The BBC has a high reputation at stake in fiction. Terjung sees a dilemma at the PSB, a tightrope between the older core audience and trying to win over the younger groups with challenging content.

PSBs are obviously in principle susceptible to interference by regulatory and political authorities. Former PSB developer Gabold sketches pressure exercised by his employer regarding the portrayal of Danish politics in *Borgen*. “One of the people from the Danish broadcasting said, are you making propaganda? This is a public service, you get money from the whole society, are you crazy?” Gram says about *Borgen*:

“We were told by the head of drama that we could not use the normal political parties in the show. So, we created our own (...) that were the same but with different names. So everybody would be able to recognize them. (...). We would never copy one person. If the leader was old; he was young in the series.”

To avoid reproaches of being leftist, the extreme right leader was more of “a dangerous granddad” with sympathetic features in his family context. Arlanch observes, “Public television is paid by the state, the parties; it is very difficult to create a political drama. Who is the hero and who the villain?”

### 9.5.3.3. Pay-TV

Respondents discuss the influences of the business model of pay-TV on TV series. Gallagher singles out pay-TV (in particular HBO) as innovative. Kropf sees the possibility to produce for niches as a large advantage for the pay-TV suppliers. Schweizer singles out the fact that viewers pay for a total offer as the main reason for the quality of content. In addition, taking risks is easier for pay-TV, because they do not produce twenty-two but ten episodes, avoiding the large investment and extended deliberation of ad-based and PSB channels. Wood thinks branding is one of the key features of pay-TV like HBO (premium cable broadcaster) and AMC (basic cable), that also translates into an influx of talented creators. Gallagher explains the attraction to talent: “Every creator I know looks hungrily at the cable market, at places like HBO. You don’t get a huge audience, but very high production value and a lot of artistic freedom.”

Respondents from Italy and Denmark laud the working relation and cooperation with pay-TV suppliers Netflix, Sky and HBO. Mosholt sounds like a PR manager of Netflix but means it sincerely. He thinks his series was also greenlit

because of his accomplishments in youth fiction. Petronio describes similar experiences with the pay-TV streamer.

Mosholt describes the attitude of Netflix about regional settings and topics in TV series:

“I think that one of the core thoughts that people we worked with at Netflix had, was that actually the more local you try to be the more global you will be. (...). We tried to make a show that was specifically Scandinavian.”

Mosholt emphasizes the exclusivity of Netflix products. He is not informed about viewing numbers of *The Rain*. Finally, he says, “It seems like the whole of Copenhagen is plastered with *The Rain*, the biggest billboards I’ve seen in my life, all Metro stations are covered, street artists have done huge murals.” The publicity (also) evoked press resonance around the world, and reviews in many countries.

#### 9.5.4. Goals, Mandates

The goals or mandates of organizations exercise influence on content of TV series, creators indicate. Grotenhuis connects the mandate and state supervision of PSBs with societally relevant topics:

“The public network is overseen by the government, they have to have a kind of responsibility, so you need to say something about the world we live in and some of the issues we tell in our series, have to have some relation to society.”

The ideological character of PSB broadcasters in The Netherlands needs to be reckoned with in composing series. Widman assigns a mandate on TV series to PSBs: “To find new stories, to present new creators, it is one of the missions they have.” Schweizer adds: “We are public service and try to program from arthouse to action for a wide audience, they are all paying. However, we do not do the second-rate ad-based TV channel stuff, the trash.” Alber thinks that, in Switzerland, only the PSB has the mandate and the nerve, but also the competence, viability and promotion infrastructure to create and market *Der Bestatter*. She hopes its success will evoke a string of Swiss series, also by other broadcasters. TV series are also culture, she says, groups of people that hardly consume linear TV did watch her series. Fitze names as a goal enhancing the expertise on TV series in Switzerland.

Kropf states that the German storytelling tradition is strong and reviving it in contemporary formats should be the strategic goal of, in particular, PSBs. Winger and Kropf feel that the long awaited and regularly announced boom in German TV series has finally materialized in 2017/18. In 2016, Kropf bemoaned that the fairy tales of Grimm are filmed by Americans: “We can always compete with the Americans if we have the courage to tell original stories in original ways.” Terjung describes an occasion where both an ad-based, as well as a public service broadcaster had tremendous difficulties deciding on the sale and acquisition of a developed TV series. Both organizations were inhibited for fear of image damages.

Several interviewees reflect on the divergence of broadcasters' goals and (self-ascribed) mandates that translate into ill-conceived content decisions: a writer says "I had a show in development at [an ad-based sender] and they ended up saying that it was too sarcastic for their family appeal. To [the pay-TV channel] it was too commercial. (...). [The ad-based channel] aims to have a sense of community and if you make it edgy, they are not interested because it alienates the picture."

Lüthi thinks that high-end fiction was previously not at home in ad-based TV, but this has changed: shorter series evoke a willingness to take risks. Grotenhuis still has a negative verdict:

"For commercial networks drama is only the 'in between' for advertising; they want to sell time to the advertisers, so they need an audience for the least amount of money. Commercial networks don't have any responsibility towards their audience. (...). Any statements you want to make about the society we live in, you better not, because then the audience walks away."

Regarding pay-TV, Scherfig lists the goals of Netflix in Scandinavia: "they want to make the best *Stranger Things*-like stories; they want to make sci-fi genre stories. Much more youth oriented than elsewhere." Petronio adds the storytelling goals of Netflix, i.e. binding the audience, guaranteeing continued watching of the product and binge watching. According to her, Sky aims to astonish the audience with new topics, plots and characters.

Organizations can adopt each other's content strategies and goals. Scherfig sees HBO Nordic implementing the "Danish and Swedish tradition of making high-end drama, with a lot of quality and a double story that should entertain as well as reflect on society." Often, this is done by hiring (former) executives of the imitated organization.

## **9.5.5. Policies, Power, Control**

### **9.5.5.1. Perspective of Writers and Producers**

The organizations are accredited with a high degree of power in the creation (and realization) of TV series. Fischer attributes the strong influence of the PSB on the content of *Der Bestatter* to its ownership of the rights of the series. In past constellations, he had more influence. Whatever the source of authority over series may be, Berggren states: "If channels say you have to change this, or we are not going to air it, that's final cut. Everyone knows that you don't oppose the channel." Terjung is willing to comply with broadcasters' demands, but experienced high precariousness:

"If an executive says, 'we want to have an anti-hero,' then twenty-four editors parrot this. Then a series with an evil hero flops, and even the lightest comedy has to be lighter. All is subject to moods and fashions and you should know what went down at the channel last week, what was



successful, what not. Because it determines the mood and direction of the talk you are going to have.”

Quite some respondents express strong reservations about the influence of the broadcasters, a constant interference that materializes in feedback or ‘notes,’ threats of abandonment of the project and more. Gallagher explains that – in practice – even the credited so-called creators and (executive) producers are not in charge: the broadcasters’ liaisons are. A Scandinavian writer laments the feedback (notes) by broadcasters as alibi exercises to “cover their asses to their bosses “and as based only on fear. Gylling describes an “awful project” for an advertising-based channel, a complete flop due to interference. Smith doubts the selection of content:

“Imagine a Martian came down to us and he sat in front of the television and looked at the number of detectives looking for serial killers. Watching someone cracking someone to pieces. And two people going out trying to find out who did it. I mean, I don’t know... Is that me or...?”

Kropf describes the often-contentious development process for the broadcasters: “And then they say they are bringing the director on board to interpret the script. And then we say, wait a minute, we need one signature for the whole series.”

Grisoni:

“They say not yes, not no, but maybe. If Dante was writing the Divine Comedy and he was a screenwriter, those who have said ‘maybe’ would be in the ninth circle of hell. And I hope that’s exactly where they go.”

A fair share of the interviewees (also) sketch instances and processes indicating good cooperation instead of interference. Careddu lauds and is amazed by the tolerance at RAI (2) for his gritty, controversial series, considering the prominence of ‘good’ heroes (teachers, priests) in RAI fiction. Grisoni experienced Channel 4 as supportive and clear. Gram supports wholeheartedly the (very creator-accommodating and creative freedom facilitating) policies of his longstanding employer DR and implements them without any reservations.

“When I do a TV show I know I’m in trusted with a lot of money. That money comes from all the viewers. Therefore, we have to make a TV show that doesn’t push a lot of viewers away, tells them to go to hell by showing them as the villains.”

These considerations should not be mistaken for conservative programming policies: “we always end the shows after three seasons and that’s to make room for new series and the next show can be never be like what we have done before.”

Other creators sketch coping strategies pertaining to (unwanted) interference and leverage over content on the part of broadcasters. Wännström denies the broadcasters competence on content in general but complies out of experience with most demands anyway. Ahlgren feels positively about the cooperation with broadcasters on various series, but (like Widman) she is mystified as to what exactly the organizations base their decisions on pertaining to greenlighting additional seasons of TV series. He keeps the delegates of broadcasters very well informed and thus runs seldom into trouble: “They think they are part of the production [he laughs]. (...). But in the end, if everyone can decide we have a mess.” One

troublesome occasion was the conflict with co-financier ZDF over plot elements (the killing of the main character's son) in *The Bridge*; the creators got their way in this case. Østerbye adds, "Still at a lot of companies there is no real understanding of the process. (...). As a creative you need to find your breaking point, what will I under no circumstances do to my character." Developer Gabold sketches his communication problems and other difficulties in getting series greenlit at his new ("fearful") employer. Terjung recommends keeping one's focus whilst compromising with whomever is at the table this time around.

A degree of leadership, feedback and control is positive in the eyes of several respondents: "I cannot be a good writer if I don't get feedback" (Gylling). Gallagher sees the processes very much depending on people and the outcome is unpredictable. Scherfig describes an unsupervised Von Trier messing up the follow-up seasons of two of his initially great TV series. Irlé re-casted a role with someone more attractive as "rightfully" recommended by the broadcaster.

A lack of transparency on exploitation and syndication by broadcasters is a topic. A Scandinavian writer laments the deals: "When you sell a show you give them the creative right to do what they want with the content." Gylling describes how her script was bought and finalized by someone else for another channel: "They [the original broadcaster] sold it without even telling us." Gallagher describes similar incidents.

#### **9.5.5.2. Perspective of Broadcasters**

Many developers of broadcasters defend their policies and sketch a balanced and fair quality management that does not disrupt the creative direction of the series. RAI's Andreatta elaborates on how room is created for diverse content, "The mission of RAI 1 is to be the broadly inclusive mainstream channel; the other channels must make sure innovation is not delegated to pay-TV and can afford more controversial contents." Janssen refrains from close, daily supervision of the production of fiction: "That would not be healthy." He emphasizes trust based on a lot of communication, and a flat hierarchy between the PSB delegates and the creators on the work floor of the series *Thuis*. Beraud describes similarly careful supervising and feedback mechanisms for the in-house produced TV series. The aim is "making sure the series is true to itself." Mayor sees herself not as a "boss," but as a powerful advising "partner" to the creators of *Station Horizon*. Although carefully formulated and without any doubt carried out sincerely, constraints surface in the positive processes described by the developers.

#### **9.5.6. Budget of TV Series**

The budget of a TV series is to larger extents made available, and consented to, by the commissioning organization. Mayor describes thorough examination at the PSB of the budget handed in by commissioned external producers:

"80 or 90% of the financing is by us, RTS, so they [the commissioned external creators] have to give us all the figures. Then, if they have a plus

it is good for them and if they have a loss, it is bad for them. We do not give them more money if they do not stay within budget. So, they take the risk. That's also why I trust them."

Others emphasize the controlling of the budget as well. The competence to determine budgets and control expenses seems to be a tool to capture influence on series.

The size of the budget has a strong influence on the content of TV series and is one of the more salient topics in the interviews. Respondents discuss the financial situation in the (European and Quebec) industry. Gabold: "nobody has the money anymore for making huge television series with many episodes."

Creators compare budgets of series on the (international) market, and consider their product disadvantaged (Fitze, Fischer, Kropf). Pertaining to audience perception, Grotenhuis says about his series: "People are going to think of the Good Wife, Suits or Boston Legal and other law series and compare. (...). But our budget is one-tenth of what US shows have." Beraud argues similarly: series' creators and the PSB "in Quebec are much challenged because we're one of the countries producing for a third of the costs of Americans and half of Canada."

A substantial number of creators (from Italy, Scandinavia, UK) see consequences of tight budgets but accept it as a given condition. Berggren even sees the small budget as a challenge, a driver of innovation of the processes in the production of series.

Irlé limited for budgetary reasons the filming locations to a small radius. Developer Mayor laments the consequences of small budgets regarding cast and staff. She also sees advantages in spending money on filming on location; identification by the regional audience is enlarged.

The procurement manager, Schweizer, says about in-house produced series: "They function, audience-wise, but are incredibly expensive. They are important for reputation, but so much reputation one cannot produce with our budget." PSB editor Lüthi puts matters in perspective; more money means higher production value. This is true for both film and TV drama. An adequate budget is necessary, the success of the soap *Lüthi und Blanc* was also induced by the financial leeway, he states, and: "Our budget for *Der Bestatter* only allows six episodes, one minute costs ten times more than news programs. Better do six good episodes than ten mediocre ones." Alber states that the budget of *Der Bestatter* remained the same over the seasons and is smaller than at Scandinavian series. A higher budget would mean more time, and that would affect the quality positively, she states, "We would have more material to compile. Now we do not resolve scenes the way we want." Fitze sees no important additional revenue streams emerging for *Der Bestatter*:

"Selling broadcasting rights is only lucrative for Borgen or The Killing which were sold to 70 countries, selling it to three countries brings nothing, a fraction of the costs of one episode. The same goes for DVD sales. (...). And sponsoring doesn't bring much either."

Fitze, whilst comparing to the large budgets of German PSBs, recites the advantages of an adequate budget: "With a 30% budget increase we would reach a European standard, where I want to be." Then, income from sales of the series would increase

too, he thinks. Producer Fischer says: “We fought hard. And we performed really well, considering that we have one third less money than Tatort and are much, much more successful.”

### 9.5.7. Target Audiences

The targeted audience evokes considerations for the broadcaster that can influence the content of TV series strongly. Irlé investigated the successful series on RTS (a PSB) and found that escapism is writ large. This audience preference then guided him for his own series. In addition, he says, “We have to explain more to reach a very broad audience. (...) I would call that a more mainstream writing style.” By contrast, Van Passel says about a failed and canceled show at an ad-based broadcaster: “We went too far, and we should have understood sooner that the public of the broadcaster was not the public we were making our show for.”

From a broadcaster’s perspective, Fitze states that every program slot (including *Der Bestatter*) has a target audience and an estimate of potential growth in market shares. Schweizer bases the acquisition of the broadcasting rights of series for the PSB primarily on type and size of the series’ audience reach in the home market, on costs, on his experience and instincts, and to a lesser extent on the presence of stars, the genre, the topic, and any audience limitations because of sex, violence and profanity. He feels that the TV series landscape changed drastically and irreparably for the PSB: pay-TV, new competitors, streaming, and binge watching altered the market.

Creators mention negative examples of being told to atone to (construct) audiences. Terjung laments:

“When the broadcaster for once goes out and investigates, we are told that they [viewers] are tired, the day was long, they don’t want to concentrate anymore, they want to be distracted and have nice heroes, with whom they can drink a beer. The opinion of the audience is not very positive. And then you are reminded once more that the TV audience is mainly female, and that one needs to get the women.”

Petronio refrains from using the “strong slang” of e.g., Rome, or Napoli. In contrast, Fitze claims (Swiss) dialects are essential for broad audience appeal in the country.

The respondents on occasion ponder whether their product is for a broad or a niche audience. Smith says he aims for niche audiences: the issues in *One Night* “are all kind of mainstream ideas, but I told them from four different perspectives, that makes it is a niche series.” Fischer sees the broad audience of his series coming together by aggregating various groups (women, the elderly, homosexuals,) who each are offered an identification figure, and the comedy star in a dramatic role is the additional audience magnet.

Respondents assess platforms along size and composition of the audience. The creators (Mosholt, Petronio, Østerbye, Scherfig) (co-) commissioned by Netflix, think that the company has the “most exciting” (Petronio) audience: large, worldwide, and

a congregation of many special target groups on one platform. This means a creator can offer special formats, genres and themes and have at least the chance to reach a large (if dispersed) audience. In contrast, Gram says about the PSB targeting of the national audience: "We have a quite specific target group: everybody." However, some target audience specification is deployed at DR. Scherfig mentions the one million viewers target for Sunday night at DR that was not set in the beginning of the surge of series. The requirement will have to be lowered in the light of HBO Nordic and Netflix competition. A Scandinavian writer cites and ridicules the detailed audience considerations of an ad-based broadcaster. The broadcaster says "'ah, that's funny, what if I'm a woman of 50, which character would I like then?' I would say 'yes, I'll think about that' and then go out and forget about it." Gylling sees this required detailed (and stereotypical) representation of different audience groups in fiction at all big broadcasters in Scandinavia. Kropf, at present, works on a script for a supplier that is not "exclusively focused on 30-50 years old women for whom all the big channels demand the inclusion of specific storytelling and character elements." Terjung states: "On controversial topics, to the channel, the hero needs to be in line with the opinion of the audience. I think that is boring, the public can make up its own mind."

Østerbye appreciates the targeting suggestions of Netflix as orientation. Berggren says about the production of *Elven* at TV3, an ad-based channel: "That's maybe why they don't interfere with us so much because we are very aware of the core audience."

In a reversed chain of argumentation, successful series can help channels expand or replenish their audience (with younger viewers), as Careddu says about his series *Rocco Schiavone* on RAI 2. Scherfig sees the quality of *Skam* (a Norwegian TV series, aimed at teenagers that integrated social media interaction and dissemination elements) as the cause for a level of success beyond the targeted youth audience.

Winger sees a mismatch of TV series and broadcaster for his series *Deutschland 83* at RTL. It had modest ratings among the channel's target audience, and the series' target audience does not watch the channel: "There are walls between RTL and the PSB on the one side, and the younger premium channel viewers on the other, and we had to climb that wall. It was more difficult than I thought."

The broadcasting time slot (day and hour) is another hindrance for success because the targeted audience might not be there at that time, says Kropf. He achieved moderate ratings with his comic crime series at a "very difficult early evening time on Thursday, where ARD has canceled several series previously." Deroche-Miles pinpoints the wrong BBC time slot (10 pm on a weekday) for *One Night*: "It was an absolute gem. And the audience wasn't there because people went to bed." Fischer remembers that the PSB feared losing the Tuesday audience that was used to German crime series by programming *Der Bestatter* at this time slot. The audience grew instead.

Developers in the service of the broadcasters all claim to have valid insights into the audience and feel they have the competence and authority to exercise

influence based on audience considerations. The industry expert Wood is on the broadcasters' side: creators "have to be working within the parameters of what the broadcaster needs." These needs are (also) conceived based on (the perception of) audience demands. Negative consequences can emerge from this line of decision-making on content. Wood thinks that the preferences of the ("old" and "loyal") German TV audience caused a lack in innovation of fiction: "So the broadcasters say: why should we change? Everybody is still watching. They are coming more under threat now from Sky Deutschland and Netflix. But up until now [2017] they haven't had to change a thing." Deroche-Miles gives reasons for conservative programming and thus sketches a catch-22 situation. If the broadcasters "go for something which is a bit more challenging, you will be literally destroyed by the ones who are showing something like *Poldark* or *Indian Summers*". Lüthi says that the (intentional) bleak coloring of *The Bridge* would drive the mainstream audience away. By contrast, series supervisor Alber believes the audience can also fluctuate, change, be educated, and brought in. *Der Bestatter* attracts a younger audience in addition to the core audience of the time slot, also because of the main actor. Alber tried not to have too many audience considerations in developing and writing the series. In this, she is an exception among the broadcasters' middle management staff.

One solution to feisty competition and audience losses is already established: catch-up of programs through online players of the broadcasters makes up a substantial part of the viewing. Gabold says about the audience

"From 12 years old they're watching online. They are not available as a normal television audience. And they keep on watching online until they are 45. We have (...) DR3 which is a young adult channel. And they have no viewers! We screamed, the Danish broadcasting cooperation, come on, let it run on the internet! So now programs are at the same time on the net as on linear TV."

### 9.5.8. Advertisers

In ad-based TV, the advertisers can be regarded as organizations (potentially) taking influence on content. These influences were previously discussed. Pertaining to actual advertising forms and clients included or acquired by the broadcasting or producing organization, hardly any influences on the content of TV series emerge. Where the broadcaster includes commercials, most creators do not know what products are advertised. Interspersing TV series with ads is, however, an issue. Ramosino says about broadcasters in Italy: "They don't look at the point in the narration. So, it is very disrupting in terms of storytelling." The commercials are not connected to program content, just to time slots, which is, to Fitze, possibly a missed opportunity. He names candidates for product placement that would match the, superficially speaking, macabre content of *Der Bestatter* and explains that it was hard to find partnering firms.

Product placement is widespread in the industry and seems mainly to be a way to reduce costs, to receive props, costumes, etc. at cheaper prices. Grotenhuis points

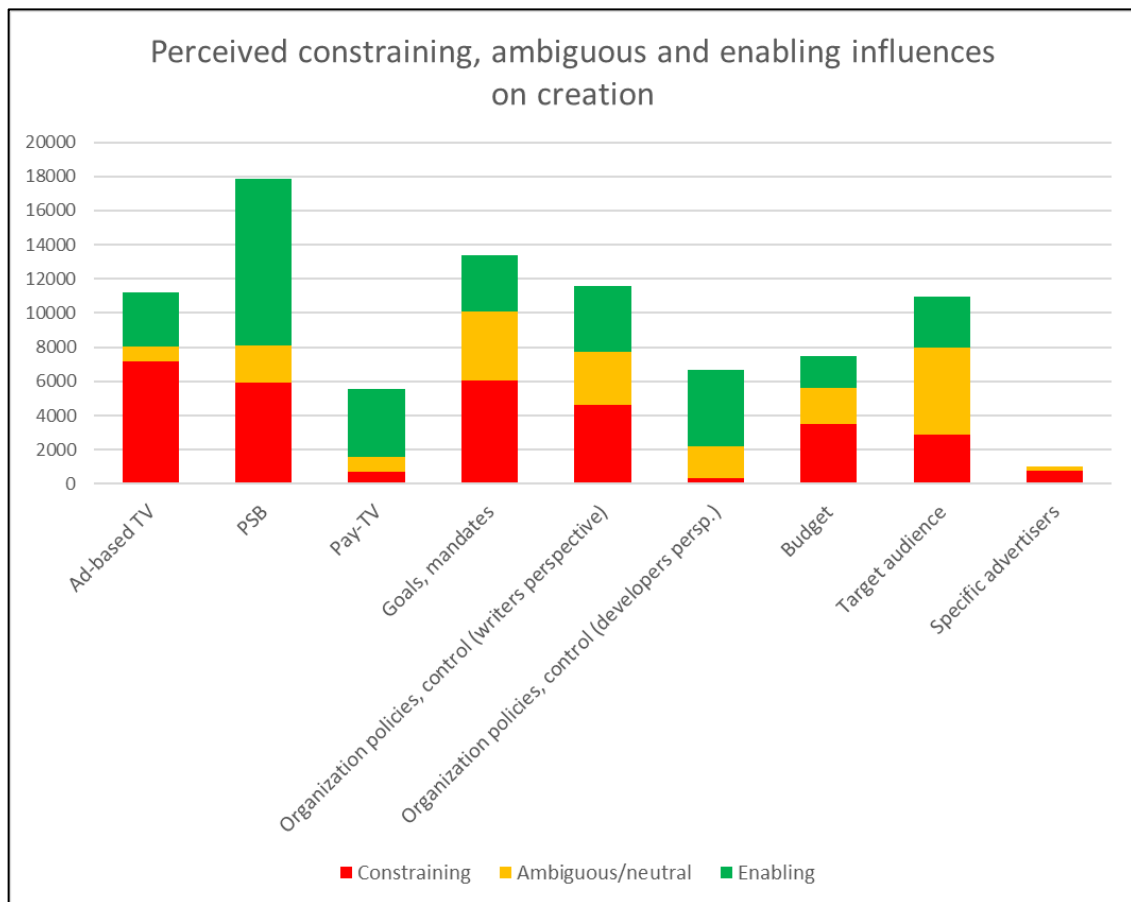
to media regulators enforcing restrictions on product placement: fines are exuberant and commonplace.

Promotion of tourism by filming on a location is increasingly important to the fiction industry and occasionally emerges in the data. Berggren adapted the setting (and story elements) of his series, he received support from local authorities to film in Northern Norway.

### 9.5.9. Overview: Perceived Organization Level Influences

In Figure 12, the constraining and enabling influences on the organization level are quantified. An overview is rendered in the box.

*Figure 12. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling organization level influences on creation in number of words in statements*



*n=85'744 words in statements assigned to the organization level of influences*

- Broadcasters exert a large influence on the content of TV series
- Constraining and enabling influences are distinguished along business models by creators
- Fewest constraints at pay-TV broadcasters. Enabling: focus on content, scripts and audience, controversial issues; large budgets; global aggregate of niche audiences

- PSBs: dominant focus on large mainstream audiences, to an extent room for societally relevant topics
- Assessment by creators of PSB policies varies. Scandinavians: harmonious picture, in most other countries relationship controversial
- Pros of PSBs to small majority of creators: large potential audience size, budgets, resources, reputation, national impact, mandate, varied topical emphasis, a degree of willingness to take risk and innovate
- Cons of PSBs to large minority of creators: bureaucracy, mainstream focus, formulaic processes, conservative, adverse to controversy and politics
- Ad-based TV: influence of the dependency on advertising, large audiences and mainstream-conform content
- Cons of ad-based TV to creators: strong interference, fixation on inadequate construct audience and ratings, incompetence, conservative derogatory attitude towards viewers, commercial breaks, no relevant topics, controversy, lack of respect for culture, creators and content
- Pros of ad-based TV: little bureaucracy, rapid decisions, audience information
- Outcome of cooperation with any (PSB, ad-based) organization (also) strongly depends on people, personalities
- Fulfilment of mandates (of PSBs) enables mediation, neglecting to do so constrains. Narrow interpretation of goals and mandates constrains content
- Broadcasters' control over the budget → leverage over content
- Size of budget constraints, but is often accepted as a given → influence of limited budgets on content of TV series is negative in highly competitive market
- Most creators take audience considerations very seriously, a minority ignores 'wrong' construct audience considerations of broadcasters
- Some creators prefer broadcasters with largest audience (PSBs and ad-based TV), others prefer audiences with more ascribed cultural capital (niche channels, pay-TV)



## **9.6. The Perceived Routines Level Influences on TV Series' Content**

### **9.6.1. Introduction and Conceptual Factors**

Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 168) state that media routines stem from three domains: (1) organizations, (2) audiences, and (3) suppliers of content. Regarding domain (1), to cope with the gregarious task of realizing a TV series, processes of varying forms and extents are established. Domain (2) of Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 168) here consists of the ways that creators aim – at least in principle – to meet audience demands. A story production 'routine,' a set of rules by which the story is told, is the genre (or type) of series. Finally, creators are providers of TV series to organizations (broadcasters), thus domain (3), suppliers of content, is discussed in detail in the previous and the following chapter. Here, the selection process of TV series by broadcasters is discussed in some detail. Some attention is devoted to sources of the material that the creators work into TV series.

The issues pertaining to the routines level influences that are salient in the data are categorized as: creation as process; creation by teamwork; roles in teams; decision-making in teams; genres, types and audience needs; and sources of TV series.

In general, a large overlap exists between influences place able at the individual, routines and organizational levels of the conceptual model of Shoemaker and Reese. All consist of influences that are exerted within the organization of the creation of TV series. Hence, in the chapters on the individual and organization levels on occasion evidence is presented that also informs on influences located on the routines level.

### **9.6.2. Creation as Process**

The way the creation of a TV series is organized is a very prominent topic in the interviews. Respondents explain in detail how their series were conceived, written, pitched, greenlit, and realized.

The first stage of the creation is the development from ideas to scripts. The original ideas are often worked into a "bible" (Mosholt, Kropf), consisting of the universe of the series: the basis story arch, the characters, and an indicator of the atmosphere. The development from early outlines to elaborate scripts for a pilot, an episode or a season requires resources that are made available by prospective broadcasters or production companies. The selection process of projects for further development exerts an influence on the content of TV series.

At some time during the earlier stages of the project, the series will have to be pitched to prospective 'buyers.' Pitches come in different shapes. Sometimes, a story outline, characters, tonality and examples are presented, other times a whole project

including key crewmembers, cast, locations and full pilot scripts are introduced. If the broadcaster was the instigator of the series, the status quo of the project will have to be presented by the creators.

Broadcasters deploy selection procedures and evaluate the development projects of TV series. Hermans: "At any time we have 20 to 30 pitches. (...) Then we let five to ten projects be developed further." The creators subsequently work their pitch into a next stage – with complete story arches and full characters – that is assessed again. Broadcasters indicate a maximum capacity. Alber mentions receiving 97 pitches of 5 to 15 pages each for a new series the PSB intends to produce. Beraud says:

"I try not to have more than 40 series in total in production, airing or in development. A series has to have a chance to make it on the schedule (...). We develop almost three third of the season before we give it a green light, we don't do pilots."

The criteria for assessment of pitches and scripts are, according to Janssen and Hermans of the Flemish PSB: local stories with a universal appeal, and/or a societally relevant second plot, an attention-attracting high concept, appealing characters, a strong story arch, fresh ideas, a mixed or twisted genre, and, last but not least, a fit to the existing program. Beraud formulates flowery and noncommittal: "You see the quality of the scripts, the voice, the writing, and the smarts; fresh, interesting, very human and very appealing." Fitze adds an outstanding argument in evaluation of pitches: the team experience of the writers is of essence in the light of the fiction production strategy of the PSB.

Writers describe the pitching and selection processes. Gallagher says that successful pitching and developing depends to a degree on the status of the producer. If she/he is successful, the power shifts from the broadcaster to the pitching team. Gabold is a highly successful developer and creator. He sketches the response by his employer to his European series project: the assessing executives "get a little empty in their eyes when I'm talking about these multi-lingual things. They say, 'Don't forget that we want to do American remakes. We cannot possibly put money in this thing, but if you have distributors in Europe, please, go ahead'. But they [the executives of his employer] are not interested."

Creators point out constraints. Widman describes difficult choices along the way in the decision-making about a series: "When we meet a financier, a broadcaster that says, 'ah, it is good, but you have to do this and that.' If we like it, we go with them. If we don't like it, we stop, because you can't do something that you don't believe in." Careddu emphasizes evoking emotions with the initial ideas or scripts. Respondents mention originality and a unique voice or vision in a presented project without detailing what these concepts entail.

After the further development was greenlit (and financed), the process of scripting and then filming the TV series continues. Terjung, Winger, Fischer, and others describe numerous rounds of overhauling script: writers, producers, and

directors adapt the material based on feedback given by some or many stakeholders in the creative team.

### 9.6.3. Creation by Teamwork

Teams shoulder the large work burden of the realization of TV series. Widman says that ten episodes, scripted by one writer, are an enormous and nearly impossible workload. The evidence at the 'routines' level pertains mostly to production by an 'inner circle' of writers, producers, together with developers in the service of the commissioning and/or financing organization.

Regarding the scripting of series, the writers' room is a concept adopted from the US and successfully implemented on a wide scale in Denmark at the PSB DR. The organization form became more in vogue in Europe, says Gabold. The writers' room can take on many shapes. This form of collaborative scripting by a group of writers in a designated working space spread to an extent in Scandinavia and was adopted at the Swiss PSB for *Der Bestatter*, as well as at *Deutschland 83*, says producer Winger. Alber sees many advantages of writers' rooms: more energy; better ideas, plot and character development; improved reflection and decision-making; mutual support; a coherent vision about and in the series. Fischer, Winger and Gylling indicate that the collaborative chemistry is important. Alber seeks diverse specializations for her writers' room.

Deroche-Miles and Gram state that soaps in the UK engage large numbers of writers. Ahlgren mentions first three, and later five writers working on *The Bridge*. The work on story, plot, setup and scenes is thoroughly planned and phased in intense five-day periods interchanged with time for individual reflection and elaboration. The overarching storyline is followed by episode writers but is often adapted during the process. Incorporating many episode writers complicates matters and is not planned for season four, says Ahlgren. Hermans distinguishes for the long-running soap *Thuis* a head writer, a synopsis editor, a dialogue editor, a researcher, four treatment and ten dialogue writers.

More often mentioned in the sample are collaborations of key creators consisting of two to three writers, or one writer and either a producer or a director. In quite some cases, the developer in the service of the commissioning organization takes part in the creative process. Ramosino is enthusiastic about collective efforts of people with different roles. Wännström gives her vision of what she, a producer, does in a creative team: "I am hopefully good in putting everyone together and getting one story out of it. (...) I work with the same people and we trust each other very much." She points out the problems – as she sees them – to the writers without recommending solutions. The team is of more importance for the result than the series' budget, she finds. According to Widman, in Sweden, writers are usually not on the set. Thus, the cooperation and sharing of the series' vision with the director attains even higher importance. His own constituting influence on *Real Humans* stems from writing and postproduction.

Creators and developers propagate a tightening of the cooperation within a circle of writers, directors, producers and the broadcasters' developers. Wood says,

“the writers are very important, but they need to work within the framework of the team of three. The broadcaster, producer and writer. Not independently.” Gylling states that “one vision” proclaimed by DR is now replaced by the broadcaster with the slogan “shared vision,” i.e. less dominance by the head writer, more power to the group of key creatives. Alber states that the basic ‘format’ of *Der Bestatter* is the result of many influences exerted in the early phase by the writers, the producer/director, the main actor, the camera man, PSB cadre, and her. The head of drama closely follows the course of the PSB’s important in-house series.

Most Scandinavian interviewees describe fruitful cooperation between the writers and producers of a series on the one hand and closely involved delegates of the broadcaster on the other. The Germans are less positive: the way the creative process is traditionally managed in their home market prevents any constituting power of the writer. Gylling saw a Danish series failing because of insurmountable differences between the producers with international syndication ambitions on one side, and her and the broadcaster with national audience resonance goals on the other. Alber emphasizes the efforts to understand and find a consensus.

#### **9.6.4. Roles in Creative Teams**

In the following, respondents describe the tasks and functions in the creative team of their series, and comment on the composition and the chemistry. Gabold states that writers do not want to direct for lack of time. Mosholt had to get used to being a showrunner in the American sense for his Netflix series. In Denmark, the head writers have the lead in a cooperative effort, but are still mainly writers. Grisoni finds that, as a writer, he is “an important part of the production. (...). As a screen writer, your key responsibility is the screen play, the script.” He believes in very close, non-hierarchical cooperation with directors and producers on his series. Developer/writer Alber confirms the necessity for writers to be aware of what happens on the set during filming. She also remembers instances at productions where the directors ventured away from the intentions of writers, with unfavorable results. At *Der Bestatter*, the writers’ vision has prevalence, by order of the commissioning PSB.

PSB editor Lüthi feels that the top priority ought to lie with the network of characters (actors) in a series. As an editor, he recalls making the recaps (summaries) of 250 episodes of a previous PSB series. At *Der Bestatter*, the recaps became a conflicted issue. He sees a nervousness around the series: “In the past no one cared about TV series, now they are prestigious.”

The division of labor over various roles often works well in the realized TV series discussed by creators. However, several statements (by Careddu, Grisoni, Smith, Ramosino, and others) pertain to curtailments caused by malfunctioning cooperation and ‘wrong’ interpretations of the role, e.g., directors changing scripts of authors (Kropf).

### 9.6.5. Decision-Making in Teams

Constraining as well as enabling conditions for the inclusion of messages as envisioned by creators were presented in the previous chapter(s). The most important influence on content on the routines level is the decision-making in the inner circle of production of the TV series. The constraints and facilitators of individual influences surface in the outcome of the deliberations in the key production team.

The lead in the different constellations of creators producing the scripts often lies with the head writer(s), at times with the producer, and seldom with the film director. For approximately half of the sample's series, respondents sketch a flat hierarchy. Discussions are numerous; a consensus needs to be reached. Mosholt says, "Most of the process is conflicts. And only in the end you see if it all makes sense." Scherfig describes a flat hierarchy and not one, but three visions pursued in *The Bridge*: "We have a strong cooperation with the producers and directors and we really listen to each other, although there is a head writer." Scherfig says that the key decision-making at TV series occurs at the editing. Conflicts occurred often, but "we go for the ball, not the player. The project is king, not the individual." Less geared towards flat hierarchy and consensus is Østerbye:

"I don't think that artistic processes are democratic. It is not always a good thing to talk about a story line for two days in a row in a room with five other writers because it will not end up democratic, but just the story we all like. But that is not necessarily the best story."

Irlé has the lead in a project and explains his partnered "showrunner" status that is novel to the commissioning PSB:

"We are two authors; we have been co-directors and producers. There is a coherence in the responsibility throughout the whole project. It is not authors giving the project to a director, managed by a producer and everybody shoves the responsibility in an expensive series off to the others if something doesn't work."

Everyone in a crew wants special attention and additional resources; the balancing act by the deciders is of essence and requires a learning curve. Writer and PSB series' supervisor, Alber, found the verdict on replacing writers almost too large a burden. Her main task is steering the direction of the series together with the writers, and sometimes exercise her authority. "It is more a matter of effort than of mad ingenuity," she refers to popular myths about infamous (US) showrunners. Lüthi thinks that the workload of TV series is so big that omnipotent leadership can only be successful by the grace of a good team. He says that the key to success for the internationally co-produced series *The Team* lies in following one artistic vision: "The sovereignty of the creators allowed for the partners to hand in proposals that were then seriously dealt with, accepted or rejected with arguments." Ramosino and Arlanch feel that the complex international co-production *The Medici* functioned

because of a showrunner with enough status (Spotnitz) to decide on the many conflicts.

Creators from the UK, Germany and Italy lament the hierarchy at TV series most. Producers and developers have the final say, whilst (head) writers are disregarded and not on the film set. Smith sees writers and their material at the mercy of the producer and the head writer. Smith never became a writing team player, after his first experiences: "I wrote this script, I put all the quirky, personal things in. They said, 'absolutely fantastic, fabulous'. Then they shot it and they dropped every single new bit I added." Ramosino and Petronio tell similar tales, a writer says, "you are lucky if you recognize your own script." Careddu witnessed directors changing scripts on a whim, "butchering" the original intention. Kropf remembers: "The director says: this character would never say something like this. We: Yes, he would, we know, we invented him."

Janssen explains the formal hierarchy and subsequent supervision procedure from a broadcasters' perspective. The channel manager is responsible for a program. Between the manager and the creators of the show, a content manager liaises. The creative team of the series *Thuis* have a lot of autonomy throughout the year. Two or three times per year, they provide an outline for the next period. Controversial topics are discussed with the content manager and can be escalated. PSB developer Mayor indicates trust in the makers of *Station Horizon* and visits the set only a few times in 60 days of shooting: "People know what they have to do and I am always in the way." Smith says there were not so many constrictions, while mentioning several approval procedures for *One Night* at the BBC.

#### **9.6.6. Genres, Types and Audience Needs**

The influences exerted by genres and types of TV series on the content, and thus on the inclusion of societally relevant messages, is an important scholarly and trade press topic. The topic is marginally salient in the data at hand. Genres of TV series are – in the reviewed literature – connected with audience demands and success.

Creators describe and promote their products in terms of at times highly specific and elaborate genres: high-class workplace drama, post-apocalyptic environment youth drama, psycho burnout thriller, feel good prime time social soap, coming-of-age story, etc. All primarily discussed series are dramas: crime; procedurals; life world and work place series; police, hospital and prison series; historical drama. Comedies are on occasion discussed as a previous project.

Most shows deploy within-episode resolutions (in 'series') as well as longer story arches (in 'serials'). Thus, the difference between the ideal types pertaining to audiences, narrative space and inclusion of messages is not a topic for writers. For broadcasters, however, it can be. PSB editor Lüthi saw the potential of alienating the audience with a time slot by replacing a German crime 'series' with a 'serial' (*Der Bestatter*). Alber recalls objections as well as excitement about the postponement of the resolution of the show to later episodes.

Other typologies used by creators are 'network-type series' (mainstream audience, occasionally conservative, traditional, simple, etc.) versus 'HBO-type shows' (for niches, smaller audiences, occasionally experimental, controversial, transgressive, etc.). Alber seems to think of a continuum between 'Network' and HBO series and thinks the production team of *Der Bestatter* cannot lean too far towards the latter. Fischer thinks the format (i.e. in this case, characters, cast, a star, setting, tempo, visual style) of *Der Bestatter* is what draws the audience, despite, as he acknowledges, some quality flaws.

Beraud believes that TV series must find their core audience and the (specific) genre is one way to appeal to viewers. Attracting women, he finds, is a key to success: once they are watching, other groups will follow. His series *Unit 9* aims at a female audience but also attracts a surprisingly substantial share of male and even young viewers. Wood sees the genre (also) as a sales argument towards the actual client, the broadcaster: creators "should be asking when they start out, (...) what genre is missing?" The PSB series *Tag und Nacht* was broadcasted at a time slot for a mainstream audience, whereas the dedicated fans of US (hospital) series would have been the right target group, says Fitze. Mosholt points to adaptations for a Danish (European) audience: "The post-apocalyptic genre is a very American thing (...) about the survival of the individual. But we took a perhaps more social kind of view where it becomes more about the survival of the group."

Smith doubts the relation between genre and target audience and thinks watching a series depends on the mood of the viewers: "Some nights you just fancy pizza or some nights you want to go to a really new, cutting edge restaurant." He does see himself as a supplier to niches. Grisoni sees a lot of different audiences in TV, but

"we have to move much quicker and be much smarter if we want to keep up with our audiences. Otherwise, they're not going to watch TV. And they've been turning off for a long time. People don't want to live on a diet of candy floss."

Grisoni, Ahlgren and others claim not to think about the genre and audience whilst writing or producing their series.

"It used to be a saying in the US political series don't work. Until *The West Wing* came, and then it became a boom. And since *The West Wing*, we have *House of Cards* and *Borgen* that bring something to the audience that the audience wants. (...). It is cyclical: genres come, turn stale, vanish, and come back refreshed again" (Beraud).

Many creators work only in one genre and do thus not compare the narrative space across genres. Some confirmation is found for different genres affecting the bandwidth of messages. If an opinion is uttered, creators find drama a suitable vehicle for reflections on society. Smith sees comedy open to controversial messages. Expert Deroche-Miles finds the narrative space (for messages) in 'high-end' (or 'Quality-TV') larger than in other series.

### 9.6.7.Sources of Material

The source and nature of the original material that creators turned into TV series determines the content of the final product to a substantial extent. Messages included in the original can be amplified, adapted, weakened or removed. In Italy, a tradition of filming classic novels and historical highlights is established. Arlanch is regularly commissioned to turn the stories into TV material. The series *Sotto Copertura* is based on a true mafia prosecution story; Arlanch spent a lot of time with the police officer on the case and dramatized the events. He says the realism of the series explains its success. Andreatta describes the cooperation with novelist Ferrante for the development of *My Brilliant Friend*, a worldwide bestseller that also tackles social issues in Naples. Novels that have worldwide success discuss universally appealing topics, the RAI developer thinks. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* is also turned into a TV series by RAI.

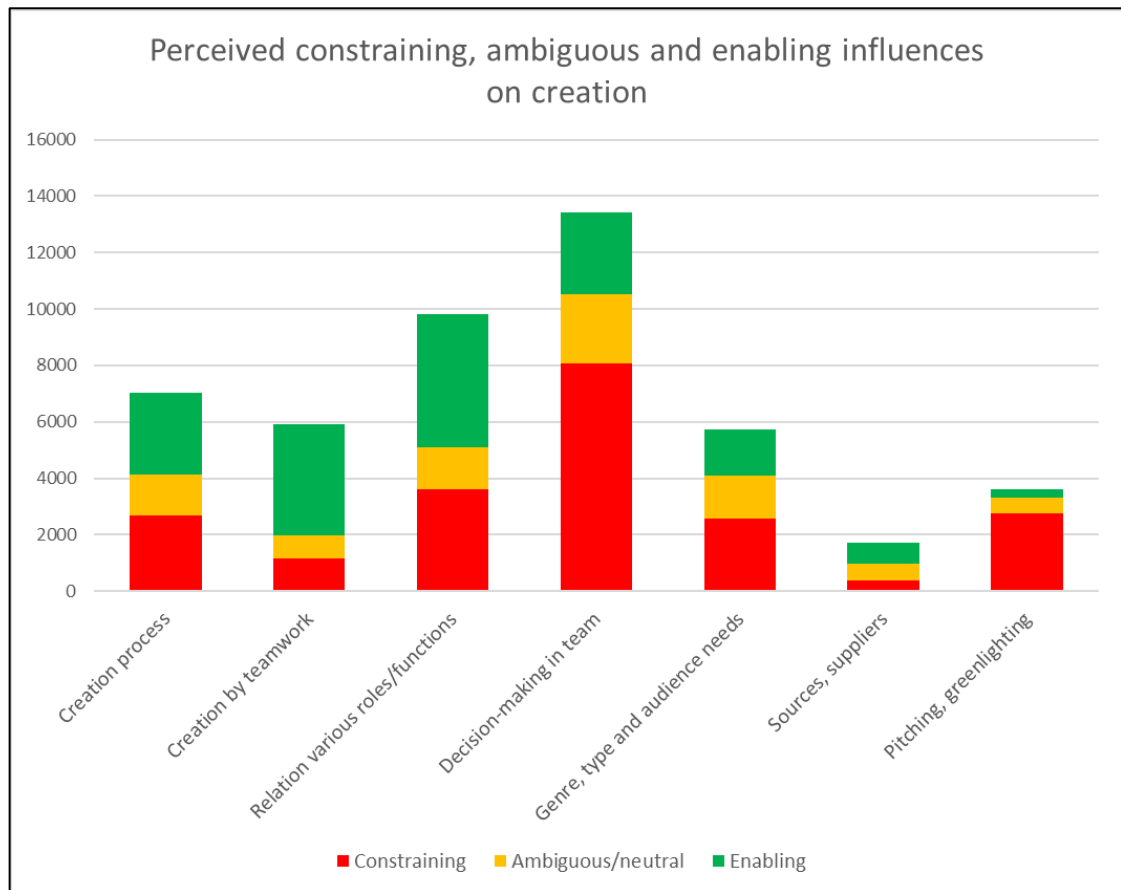
Grotenhuis based his series on a blog about the practice of law. Petronio was invited by Netflix to turn the (relatively successful) film *Suburra* into a TV series. The film was based on a (successful) novel. Petronio sees the realism and real-life crime and corruption issues of the novel being portrayed in the TV series more than in the film. Careddu's series is based on a successful series of novels. The creator stayed relatively close to the original. Ahlgren had her series *The Bridge* remade in the US (under the same title). She also produced the series *Gåsmamman* that is, in turn, a remake of *Penoze*, a Dutch series. She says that after the rights are sold, the creators of the remake have all the freedom to decide on content.

### 9.6.8.Overview: Perceived Routines Level Influences



The constraining and enabling influences on the routines level are quantified and presented in Figure 13. An overview is rendered in bullet points in the box under the figure.

*Figure 13. Salience of perceived constraining and enabling routines level influences on creation in number of words in statements*



*n=47'178 words in statements assigned to the routines level of influences*

- Task of producing series is carried out by large teams
- Common in Europe: production inner circle of writers, producers and broadcasters' developers → in decision-making composition, functioning and hierarchy are of importance, impact success
- One end of continuum flat hierarchies and balanced decision-making: consensus-building in inner circle: 'shared vision'
- Other end: hierarchical decision-making → comprehensive vision: 'one vision' of head writer/producer.
- Constraints to many writers: wrong people/functionaries have much/most influence: incompetent producers and decision-makers at broadcasters
- Routines of pitching and selection process constrains creation and messages

- Specific genres and types of TV series constrain/widen narrative bandwidth: drama, serials and high-end series offer space, others constrain messages
- Genre and type of TV series influence success of TV series: meeting audience demands is more often constraint than that it facilitates mediation
- Transgression/innovation of genres enhances reputation but is not for mainstream audiences.

## 9.7. The Perceived Individual Level Influences on TV Series' Content

### 9.7.1. Introduction and Conceptual Factors

In the deployed conceptual model, the individual level consists of four factors pertaining to the communicator's influence on media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 209): (1) Personal and demographic characteristics, backgrounds; (2) attitudes, values, and beliefs; (3) professional roles; (4) power within the organization.

Factor (1), gender, education, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of the respondents is obvious or not discussed. Nevertheless, the gender of the respondent can be assumed to reflect in his/her work pertaining to the portrayal of social realities in their products. In the interview data, however, no systematic distinctions can be made out between men and women: female as well as male respondents mention the (relatively often emancipatory) portrayal of women's issues (e.g., Gylling (F), Terjung (M), Scherfig (M), Wännström (F)). *Unit 9* developer Beraud (M) says: "Unit 9 is not about women in prison, Unit 9 is about women. (...). The prison makes all the social issues faced by women even more immediate." *Borgen* developer Gabold (M) sees women around the world identifying with the series' female main character due to the sincere portrayal of women's issues. One exception to emancipatory messages is found: in a discussion of anti-heroes, the male writer of *Rocco Schiavone* (Careddu) explains and defends the misogynist behavior of his main character: "He is naughty and bad to women, but they love him." All respondents are white Europeans with a professionally adequate level of education, so no distinctions along ethnicity and education can emerge. The sexual orientation of the respondent is not discussed. Where the sporadic information surfaces, the respondents are or were in heterosexual relationships. On occasion, the portrayals of heterosexual relations in the respondents' works are discussed.

Factor (2) personal attitudes pertaining to social reality are for the most part not explicitly discussed, but surface to some extent during the conversation. Perhaps guided by considerations of professionalism, only some respondents (e.g., Gram on

democracy) state a direct connection between socio-political beliefs or values and the content of their products. It must, however, be assumed that the portrayal of societally relevant issues in the respondents' products will, to an extent, in some way be influenced by the creators' attitudes and beliefs. The insufficient investigation of salient beliefs and values in the interviews prohibits formulating any findings in this investigation of perceptions of profession- and product-related acts and experiences.

Most evidence of individual influences on content pertains to factor (3), professional roles in the production of TV series. Here, the most prominently mentioned functions are (head) writers, producers, developers, and 'showrunners' that are discussed in the next subchapter. Interwoven with this is the factor (4), power within the organization of creation of TV series. Distinctions in the findings can be made along national production cultures. An overview of the results is presented in the last subchapter.

## **9.7.2. Individual Influences on Content by Function**

### **9.7.2.1. Writers**

The interviews of this study strongly confirm the constituting influence of writers on the content of TV series. Smith, writer of *One Night*, states on the constituting influence of writers, compared to producers and developers: "So, I think they are all just as important, but they have to wait. The script comes first." To the TV series' festival programmer Deroche-Miles, in the UK, series are very much an author's product, a conclusion supported by Smith. *Suburra* writer Petronio also confirms the prevalence of writers and scripts: for creating good TV series "most of all you need good storytelling, and only then you need an interesting and new vision, a look of the series." Head writer of *Follow the Money*, Gram, steered his ambitions towards writing instead of directing, also because he "realized that the person who leads the creativity in TV series is actually the writer." *Rita* co-writer Østerbye sees the extensive duration of a writer's involvement with the TV series as one reason for his/her larger influence in the constitution of content. The same respondent also believes that a consensus between e.g., five writers does not necessarily result in a good script: "It depends on the head writers, whether they have the ability to sort out good and bad ideas." Writer of *The Bridge* Scherfig illustrates his authority in that he granted others influence. German producer Winger reflects on his latest series *Deutschland 83*: it was successful because the creators had the final say.

The non-writing functionaries in particular – more so than writers themselves – ascribe a strongly constituting role to writers. Independent producer Fischer, hired by the German-speaking Swiss PSB to realize *Der Bestatter*, confirms the importance of writers by lamenting the quality of writing in his series and in the Swiss market. The head of fiction of the German-Swiss PSB (Fitze) describes how his broadcaster has come to prioritize writing, an activity considered crucial to the valued content. The writers on the in-house produced crime series are employed by the PSB and are

closely supervised by PSB editors/writers. A strategy of raising the standard of writing in a country (because it is so important) is also deployed in Belgium by the PSB, says developer Hermans. Producer of *Towers of Power* Grotenhuis criticizes that the strategy of promoting (i.e. financing) the all-important script writing is not pursued in The Netherlands by the national media fund for audio-visual fiction. Fischer laments the same in Switzerland. The Danish developer of TV series (Gabold) explains the system he deploys to specifically train writers. The writer is the key content source, and a developer needs to see to it that the writer's vision is realized, he claims. The Swedish producers see the influence on contents of their series of the writer as decisive (Widman, Ahlgren), and large (Wännström).

### 9.7.2.2. The Epitome of Power: Showrunners

In the popular and trade press discourse on decision-making processes about TV series, the term 'showrunner' resounds often, mainly pertaining to the classical high-end TV series of the last decades like *The Sopranos* ('showrunner' is David Chase), *The Wire* (David Simon), *Mad Men* (Matthew Weiner), *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan). As showrunner, the head writer takes on director and executive producer responsibilities and thus becomes all-powerful in realizing his/her personal creative vision. The term emerges prominently among the respondents in the sample at hand. Head of fiction at the French-Swiss PSB Mayor says, "There is a job that we don't have in Europe (...), the showrunner." Industry expert Wood states that the emergence of a showrunner function is evoked by the gigantic work burden of earlier US series and the need to tightly steer the content, form and production processes to deliver a product that fulfils all requirements (enough quality, on time, within budget) formulated by the broadcaster. The function has hardly any relevance in a European context, she says. Ramosino nevertheless expresses a sentiment common among writers in the sample: "Usually writers want to be (...) showrunners."

Often, the nomination of a showrunner is seen as a guarantee for the (artistic) quality of a series. However, Ramosino adds, "writers in Italy want to work on many projects at the same time. (...). Then [being a showrunner] is not possible." Other writers mention important obstacles to becoming showrunner: insufficient knowledge and expertise regarding several production activities besides storytelling, as well as a lack of budgeting insight. Some blame the policy of broadcasters in their countries for the absence of showrunners with creative freedom in the European production scene. Whilst indicating that matter are different at present (2019), two German interviewees lament the bureaucratic 'consensus culture' that for a long time pervaded the production of series in their country. *11<sup>th</sup> Hour* writer Gallagher (UK) compares:

"The difference is that the American writer in the writers' room is invested in the show. (...). The British writer is the guy who writes the script, hands it over, and then plays no part in the production from that point onwards. (...). There are a lot of British writers who are given the title of

showrunner (...). They're made to feel good about themselves, but they don't have showrunner power."

Careddu and Petronio claim the function of showrunner does not exist in their (Italian) production scene, but Petronio indicates achieving this level of power in her next project, which she deems necessary: "Good television comes from writers and European production companies don't understand this matter, I think that we are going to lose the battle with the USA. Because they recognize the writer as the author of the story." In Scandinavia, the realization of 'one vision' is important and showrunner-like omnipotence over products is often based on finding a consensus between all main decision-makers. The consensus builds on the vision of the original creator: the writer (say Scherfig, Gram). Mosholt confirms he is the showrunner of *The Rain*, which he created for Netflix Denmark, a subdivision of a company more inclined to practice US-American modes in production of TV series.

### 9.7.2.3. Other Influential Roles: Developers, Producers

Based on the nature of the writers' function it is not surprising that their influence on (the capacious script of) TV series is generally perceived as (very) strong. Grotenhuis finds that, "in the writing-producing-directing, all three are important (...), but the writing comes first. (...). I can't produce something that is not on paper." However, limitations to the constituting power of writers also emerge in the data: other functions in production of TV series, the process of commissioning TV series, and audience considerations.

Powerful individual influences emerge in the interviews: the developer (a.k.a. commissioner, controller, content manager, head of fiction or drama) is at times directly involved in the production, and acts as a hands-on supervisor. Obviously, the developer takes his/her leverage in decision-making from representing the customer side, i.e. the broadcaster, financier, or otherwise commissioning organization in the creation of TV series, an activity that is (also) a commercial endeavor in a competitive market. Head of fiction Beraud claims: "Most creators don't think about the audience they want to reach."

Self-attributed knowledge of the (construct) audience provides broadcasters' representatives with authority on the content of TV series. Additional power is attained where the developer has script-writing reputé. The German-Swiss PSB head of fiction, Fitze, leaves no doubt that he and, by extension, his organization's delegate in the production team (Alber, dramatic advisor) have final say over the content of *Der Bestatter*: "We pay so we decide." Other heads of fiction (Beraud, Mayor, Andreatta, and Gabold) are less resolute in their wording, but the essence is identical; as paymasters, they are in principle at the helm and can exercise influence as they see fit. The influence of the writer increases where developers supervise from a distance, as seems to an extent the case for the French-Swiss, Quebec and Danish PSBs.

The writer of *The Rain*, Mosholt, explains the motivation for a relatively common trend among writers towards a degree of (anticipatory) obedience: "I really do believe it makes sense that the people who pay are the people that decide. It is so

expensive to make TV series.” Grisoni and Smith, however, argue the opposite: controllers lack expertise in the creation of TV series and have too much power.

The correlation, as perceived by several respondents, of the quality of TV series and the respective developers evidences the influence of developers further. Careddu has high hopes for a new head of fiction at the broadcasting company Mediaset, who used to be a writer. Danish respondents make statements in the same vein for the competitor of DR, TV 2.

Producers are another set of professionals that are accredited with large constituting power in the interviews. The producer of *Gåsmamman*, Wännström, says, “Yes, I always have the final say.” About *The Medici*, Ramosino states the same for the executive producers in the service of the production company of the series. She also describes her own highly important creative producing task as “to manage the relationship between the Italian and British writers, trying to find a compromise [she can live with] in terms of style and teams.” Producer Fischer sees himself as influential in the creation of *Der Bestatter* but admits that his power is based on his close relationship with the main actor (“the star”), in addition to his accomplishments and experience in Swiss fiction. Writer Petronio also accredits the producers with strong influence on content and mentions daily conflicts.

### **9.7.3. Individual Influences on Content by Country**

On the previously discussed levels, some distinctions between countries emerged but systematic comparisons across countries were not warranted. Pertaining to individual influences on content of TV series, however, remarkable similarities within, and differences between what one can call ‘national production environments’ emerge.

#### **9.7.3.1. Denmark, Scandinavia**

As Redvall (2013) points out, the Danish production culture is molded by the PSB DR, and the prevalence of the PSB’s established practices is driven by the national and international success of *The Killing*, *Borgen* and other series. The large influence of (head) writers on content is part of the basic philosophy (formulated as ‘dogmas’) at DR and shows strongly in the sample. Former DR Developer Gabold clarifies the relations:

“The writer is the most important one, because he starts the story, he knows what he wants, he follows it along, (...) and then the director comes, who is responsible for the cinematography, whereas the writer is responsible for the content. A development executive has to see to it that these two come together, like falling in love or like a marriage. (...). You are not allowed as a developer to go [too much] into the creative process. You go into the practical process”.

More than other respondents, the Danish writers refer to themselves as creators. The often-mentioned ‘one vision’ is commonly the one of the head writer(s), but much

attention goes out to the enhancement of the influence of writers by the collectivization of their original vision in the production team.

The power relations between writers and developers (and producers) in Denmark, at DR in particular, are perceived as balanced and unproblematic. The Swedish producers Wännström and Ahlgren also laud the relationship with an ad-based channel at the production of *Gåsmamman*. On the other hand, producer Widman of *Real Humans* prefers to not deal with the manifold demands of broadcasters and distributors and rather focuses on early-stage development of projects. Good cooperation between all involved sides requires an investment. Gram emphasizes, “the key is also time to build a consensus on the ‘one vision’ that is then created and collectively supported.” Mosholt says he “needed to convince Netflix to deploy the flat hierarchy that is common here.” He elaborates:

“We have a system where people get the responsibility for what they’re good at. I am not a director; I am not a production designer. There are so many things that I am not that good at. So, I really respect the way we are working and of course sometimes that leads to conflict or to discussions, but I think in the process it is needed to do the best we can.”

The interchange between the Scandinavian countries is reflected in the sample in that the Swedish creators largely show the same tendency: collective support of an originally individual (writer’s) vision is most fruitful.

### 9.7.3.2. The United Kingdom

The UK TV series industry is arguably the most mature (in terms of history and output) of the sampled countries. The statements of the respondents show less coherence than in, e.g., Scandinavia. The industry experts, consultant Wood (“if it is not on paper, it cannot be made”) and festival programmer Deroche-Miles (“the single voice of the writer is very, very important”) accredit the writer with the largest and essential influence on content.

Two writers (Smith, Grisoni) see themselves and their colleagues as – in principle – exercising the constituting influence on content. In practice, the influence is unjustly restricted by, mainly, developers (“controllers,” “producers”) employed by broadcasters. They mention numerous conflicts (of other writers). Smith thinks that good results depend on the personal relationships between writers and producers. The latter best support the former, he feels. Smith adheres strongly to the division between creative and business contributors to a product (“it is like oil and water, they don’t mix”), whereby the former should have the lead to achieve high quality. Smith praises the BBC for taking chances and letting newcomers write. Channel 4 or BBC 2 are regarded, by some respondents, as easier to work with.

The third writer (Gallagher, *11th Hour*) has written for UK as well as US TV series and complies wholeheartedly with the large influence of the broadcasters’ delegates. He rationalizes: “What’s the best way to get my stuff to the biggest audience? Certainly, the most lucrative audience is in American networks. (...). By

going for the biggest audience, you're also choosing the largest degree of artistic compromise."

### **9.7.3.3. Canada**

The single Canadian respondent lauds the large influence of writers (and any associated producers) on the content of series: "When you start developing a show you hope that what the voice and the vision of the creator and what the creator is beaming at, you hope that it will touch an audience." He does have reservations about the influence, in particular pertaining to the alignment with audiences. This facet is underdeveloped at creators, he finds. Although the writers and producers theoretically ought to have the major constituting influence on the series, Beraud mentions many checks and balances build into the production processes at his broadcaster. In sum, his influence as developer has to be regarded as very large: "We look for the voice of the writer and what the writer (...) wants to accomplish. Then we ask ourselves: Is this original? Is this fresh? Is this a new take on something that's a brand?"

### **9.7.3.4. Italy**

The Italian writers are split into two camps: on the one side, there are those that lament a lack of influence on the part of writers. Petronio says, "In the USA they trust the writer, in Italy not. (...). The producer is responsible, not the writer." Careddu states:

"You write the screenplay and you give it to the production, or the director, and you have no way to defend your job. I went to the set a couple of times and it is very frustrating, because they put you in a chair and after 5 minutes you no longer exist to them. In the end I decided to not go there until we have a reason to go there."

The relatively low status of writers within the production hierarchy is unwarranted and leads to bad artistic and/or commercial results, is the majority sentiment.

On the other side stands the writer of *La Strada di Casa*, Arlanch, who sees his influence on his products as very strong and not diluted by presumably antagonistic forces in the production. It must be noted that he often adapts stories for TV by order of broadcasters and production companies.

The developer Andreatta acknowledges the influence of writers but indicates that she as representative of her employer RAI defines the playing ground of content to be produced: "We (...) try to make projects that are relevant for the everyday life of people." What is relevant is described in RAI's editorial lines, and entails

"basic community values, togetherness, present-day issues and contradictions, the sheer complexity of people's experience. (...). Stories, therefore, that refer to social and family issues – work, the couple, parent-child relationships, integration, marginalization. (...). Even stories set in



the past have been used to shed meaning on today, to mirror the present, investigate the roots of our culture and society.”

### 9.7.3.5. Germany

The German TV series industry changed radically in 2017 and 2018. Several new high-end series were released and many more are commissioned by an increasing number of suppliers and developed. Simultaneously, the position of creators has been (officially) strengthened. It follows that some statements in interviews (from 2016 and early 2017) were revised on request of the interviewees. Before 2017, all respondents agree, “management by committee, twenty people who in a democratic process agree on what then is the lowest common denominator” (producer Winger) was common in Germany with detrimental effects on the quality of series. For Winger’s series, a different strategy was deployed: “One has given us [the writer and the producer of *Deutschland 83*] the creative authority like at Scandinavian broadcasters, who call it one vision, so that everything fits one mold.” Writer Kropf of *Koslowski & Haferkamp*, *4 Blocks*, *Labaule & Erben*, and *The Best Things in Life* states that the writer currently has much more power over content; in the past writers just received a fee for delivering the script and were not further entitled to a say.

Writer of *Danni Lowinski*, Terjung, puts matters in perspective; the audience of a broadcaster and, by extension, the broadcaster’s delegate have legitimate concerns that must be weighed in.

In overview, writers had – by nature of their function – an influence on content, but the key to power use to lie with the (groups of) personalities in the service of PSB and advertising-based broadcasters. Currently, two respondents make out a shift of power over content of TV series towards the authors and producers.

### 9.7.3.6. Belgium and the Netherlands

In both Belgium and the Netherlands, no writers were interviewed, but the broadcaster’s delegates (head of drama and content manager at the Belgian PSB), as well as the independent producers commissioned by the (Dutch and Belgian) PSBs, credit writers with decisive influence on TV series’ content. The Dutch producer sees too little support for writing and developing in the Dutch industry, and the Belgians refer to attempts to improve writing. Producer Grotenhuis emphasizes the collective nature of the production of TV series and abstains from showrunner credits: “Showrunner is a perfectly good term, but everything in television is ‘Gesamtarbeit,’ and comes together from different perspectives. So, everybody has a share in running a show.”

Producer Van Passel of *Tabula Rasa* describes how he came to give a talented writer the influence that goes with a showrunner function. He then had to step back: “we can only afford one captain in the ship. I don’t go into discussions with the showrunner, she has the final say.” This is unusual in Belgium, Van Passel says,

“most broadcasters think they have the right to decide.” In Belgium, the subsidizing media fund will only pay out if a broadcaster is attached to a project, says Van Passel. This policy enhances the influence of the clients of TV series production further.

In overview, the writers’ influence on content can be strong, but is as substantial as the other parties (production companies and broadcasters) allow it to be. The crucial decision-making power over content lies thus with the latter in both countries.

#### **9.7.3.7. Switzerland**

The Swiss respondents see writers and writer/producers exercising essential influence on TV series. The content of the primarily discussed TV series from the German-speaking-Swiss PSB is naturally to an extent influenced by the (currently four) writers hired by the PSB SRF. However, a network consisting of PSB functionaries, an independent producer and the main actor wields the ultimate power over the product and important decisions (also regarding content details and messages) are the result of negotiations within this circle. The main actor has veto rights, says the producer, and so does the key PSB representative, say other respondents. This relatively complicated and somewhat excessive control is induced by strategic program mistakes and audience flops in the past, as well as by the very high costs of the TV series.

The French-Swiss respondents diverge from this picture. The PSB produced, compared to the German-speaking Swiss PSB, a higher number of TV series at lower costs over the years, and the PSB delegates supervise more from a distance. Even more so, head of fiction Mayor adds:

“For Station Horizon, we had this one vision, the concept of the Scandinavians. And it is not realized with a tutti frutti of ideas. (...). The people who wrote Station Horizon chose the talents, all collaborators, directed, post-produced, did the promotion and everything else.

Obviously the one vision concept is fully achieved.”

Although the details vary strongly, the general conclusion pertaining to influence on content of TV series is the same as for some of the other countries: the realization of a creator’s unique vision in a TV series that is strived for according to most respondents, depends on the leeway the decision-makers at the commissioning organizations (dare to) give.

#### **9.7.4. Audience Considerations of Creators**

No writers dispose of detailed information about the composition of the target audience. Several respondents do not see the perceived audience preferences as constraints in the creation of TV series’ content. Grisoni says, “how can we make sure to get [viewers of] 8 years as well as 50 years old to see this? If you start having those sorts of conversations, you actually produce a piece of shit.” Wännström and others argue similarly.

On the other side of the spectrum, writer/producer Irlé of *Station Horizon* says: “We think mainstream audience for our TV series. That is the task at this broadcaster.” Gallagher argues vehemently as an audience supplier, which translates into conforming to the construct audience considerations of a powerful broadcaster like NBC in the US. The Italian writers are also aware of the channel, time slot and thus the potential (construct) audience they are thought to cater to and let the considerations (sometimes grudgingly) influence their work. In the development of the political series *Borgen*, writer Gram had important audience deliberations that caused a re-write: “who the hell wants to watch politicians being assholes in a lot of episodes? *Borgen* was very much written as a show that was not the kind of TV series like ‘Yes, Minister’ or ‘The Thick of It’.” *Borgen* was not intended to portray politicians as corrupt, cynical or ridiculous, says Gram. In general, the Danish and Swedish writers have little trouble complying with perceived demands of a mainstream audience and seem to manage to walk the tightrope between satisfying artistic and audience size ambitions.

The function and mandate of a developer of fiction at a broadcaster is inherently more geared towards the prospective audience of a TV series, and all express taking audience considerations very seriously. In particular, in Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden, developers have the specific task to reach defined and relatively large audience market shares with the expensive in-house products. Some producers lean towards the ‘auteur’ side of the argument and protect the integrity of the project by not letting alleged audience preferences play a role, but most are on the side of the paying organization, its perception of the viewers, and the consequences that are drawn for content.

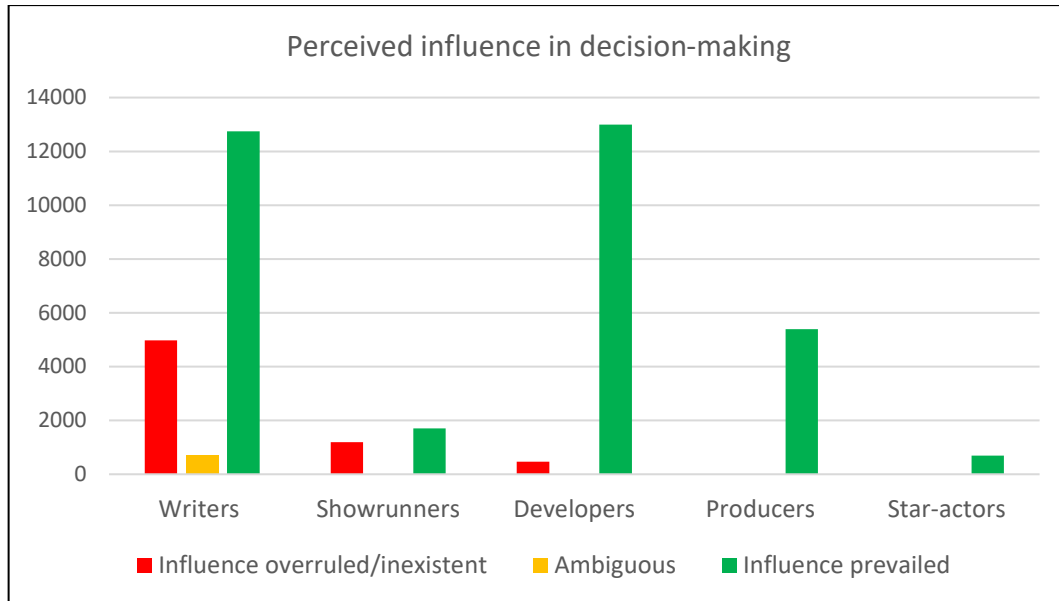
### **9.7.5. Overview: Perceived Individual Influences on Content**

The constraining and enabling influences on the individual level are quantified and presented in Figure 14. An overview is rendered in bullet points in the box.

The interpretation of the salience of influences diverges from the previously discussed levels. The individual level of influences entails the self-ascribed influence of creators on their product, as well as the perceived influence of other individuals in decision-making on TV series’ content. When, for example, a writer states getting her/his way in a series, the influence of the writer is coded as prevailing. The prevailing of the writer implies that the influence of other involved individuals (e.g., producers, developers, other writers) was outdone. In the salience analysis, only statements of respondents that describe the instance of being overruled are coded as such. The instances of implicit overruling are not coded and not incorporated in this quantitative analysis. The large divergence between countries in the influence of different functions are strongly sample-related: e.g., in Switzerland no writers were interviewed, in the UK and Germany no developers. The quantitative results

pertaining to individual influences per country are thus less meaningful and are not presented.

*Figure 14. Perceived influence in decision-making by roles/functions in number of words in statements*



*n= 40'875 words in statements*

- Professional considerations and opinions of creators influence content
- Writers: large influence on content of TV series → actual writing of (societally relevant) content
- Influence of writers is permission-based, depends on paymaster: broadcaster, production companies
- Developers in sample at hand with large and seldom curtailed influence in decision-making
- Writers, producers and developers with track record constrain other individual influencers in team, shape routines and influence organizations
- Early collective support for comprehensive, originally individual vision crucial for satisfactory realization
- US-style showrunners with absolute authority are rare, but function is strived for → concentration of power is viewed as success factor

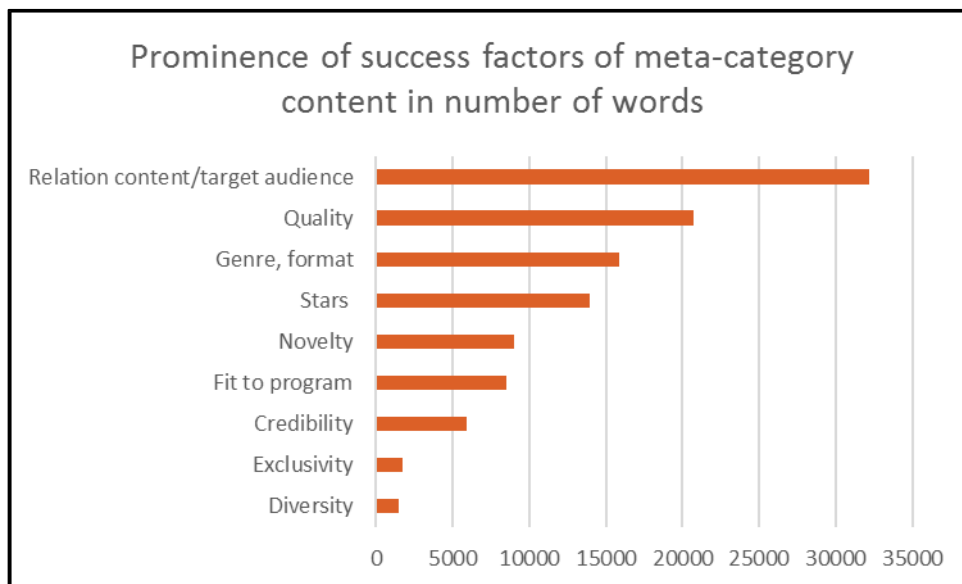
## 10. The Creators' Perception of Success Factors of TV series

This chapter begins with a subchapter in which a comparison of success factors is presented, based on the work of Verhoeven et al. (2017) who investigate success factors of all types of media products. In 10.1 the perception of content as success factor is elucidated. In 10.2, the salience of the nine (other) success factors in the perception of the TV series creators is presented. The nine meta-categories are briefly discussed in the subchapter 10.3. Societal relevance as success factor of TV series is, in turn, the topic in the entire chapter 11.

### 10.1. Perception of Content as Success Factor

The success factors that are assigned to the building block content (see 7.1.) were to an extent discussed in the interviews.

*Figure 15. Prominence of success factors of meta-category content in number of words*



*n=109'372*

Quality, genre, and stars are prominent success factors in the eyes of creators. Above all, however, the tailoring of content to diverging target audiences contributes to success. Grotenhuis says:

“When you say it is a black comedy you immediately decrease your audience. (...). [The project] is a good example of (...) we are going to make something for a specific audience. It will not necessarily attract a lot of users, but they will accept this, will relate to this and will love this.”

In subchapter 12.1, additional evidence is presented. Quality is often discussed as well. Wood summarizes, “it is always the quality (...). Whoever you speak to doesn’t matter, [if] you have George Clooney attached, and he comes down from the chalet, it still doesn’t matter.”

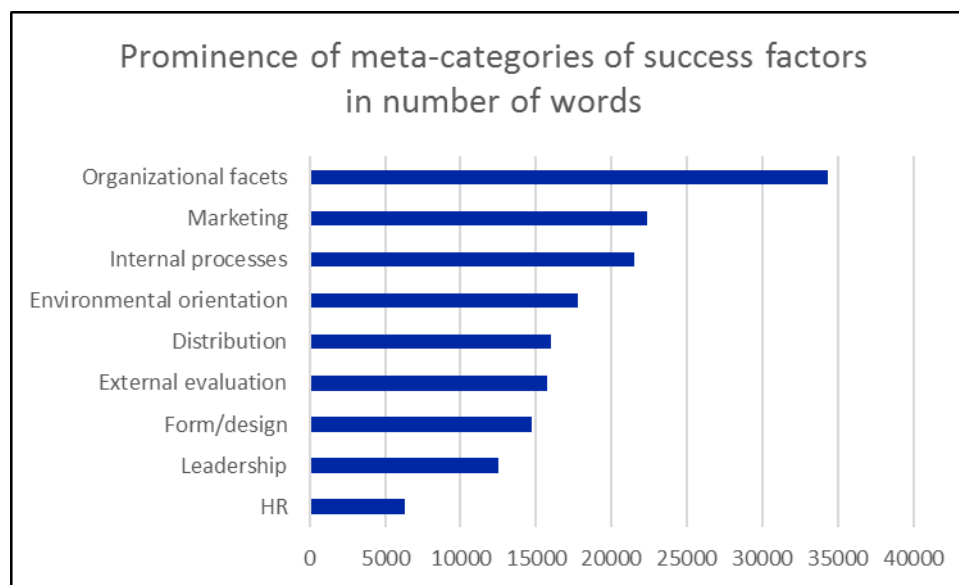
Every premiered series is ‘new’ in the literal sense, but the product can in addition be innovative and such novelty is seen as a success factor. In line with

deliberations in previous and following chapters, the fit of the product to the broadcasters' program plays a role for success. Exclusivity and diversity are factors that play a role for fiction department leaders and experts but are not applicable success factors to the other respondents who focus on their own product.

## 10.2. Salience of Meta-Categories of Success Factors

Societal relevance (as success factor) and (influences on) content of TV series are the focus of this study. The other nine potential success factors are less center-stage in this investigation, but a comparison of salience in the data informs on the perceived importance for success.

*Figure 16. Prominence of meta-categories of success factors in number of words*



*n=160'227*

In line with results discussed in chapter 9, organizational facets are perceived as very important for success. Marketing is a salient topic as well and is in exemplary instances effectively executed by the broadcaster/distributor. Internal processes are extensively discussed by the respondents, as shown in in reference to influences on content on the routines and organization levels. Distribution deals lie in the past for most of the discussed realized projects and are thus somewhat less prominent. The respondents in the sample do not emphasize form. They have other core tasks and priorities. Cinematographers, directors, set designers, etc. would assign more weight to form. HR and leadership are topics that evoke little elaboration in creative projects that are executed by 'people' networks without a highly formalized and institutionalized nature.

## 10.3. Perception of Additional Success Factors

In this subchapter, the perception of other meta-categories of success factors is discussed. For every category, the most prominent success factors are briefly

introduced, and evidence is referred to, or integrated in the section. Figures are provided for the categories that entail numerous success factors.

### **10.3.1. Form/Design**

Overall form/design is not a large success contributor in the eyes of the respondents (third last of nine categories). It is mainly discussed in the sense of (investment in) production value, which often pertains to/results in the 'look' of a series. The investment in form by, in particular, pay-TV companies is seen as contributing to success. PSBs are also at times singled out in this sense. Ad-based TV is lamented for the lack of investment that endangers the success of a product. Of the success factors of the category, the quality of the look is discussed most, followed by its consistency (maintaining the form throughout a series), and the congruence of form and content: how well does the look fit the narrative? Petronio explicates the priorities: for successful products, "most of all you need good storytelling, and then you need an interesting and new vision, the look of the series. So (...) the director of photography is very important as well."

### **10.3.2. Environmental Orientation**

Environmental orientation ranks fourth out of nine meta-categories of success factors. Reflecting the domicile of a TV series (i.e. the region/country where the series is made and the primarily targeted audience of the broadcaster resides), is a success factor in the eyes of the respondents. In connection with this, the language in the product is relevant: people's language and dialects are debated as success factors, mainly in Switzerland. The respective evidence for cultural proximity is presented in chapter 11.

A substantial share of the respondents to an extent monitor the TV series market, the new and traditional players, the trends, successes, failures and new (competing) products. Ramosino says, "I've just been to a presentation (...) of many series, (...) and you see [that] there are so many titles." She draws conclusions: one has "to find (...) a way to communicate [about] your work, because it might be really innovative but if it appears as one of the many crime stories, it is difficult." Many creators are big fans of series: "I watch a whole season on a rainy Sunday" (Alber). Of all respondents, the developers aim to be in touch with the Zeitgeist most and observe the behavior of an increasing range of competitors.

### **10.3.3. Internal Processes**

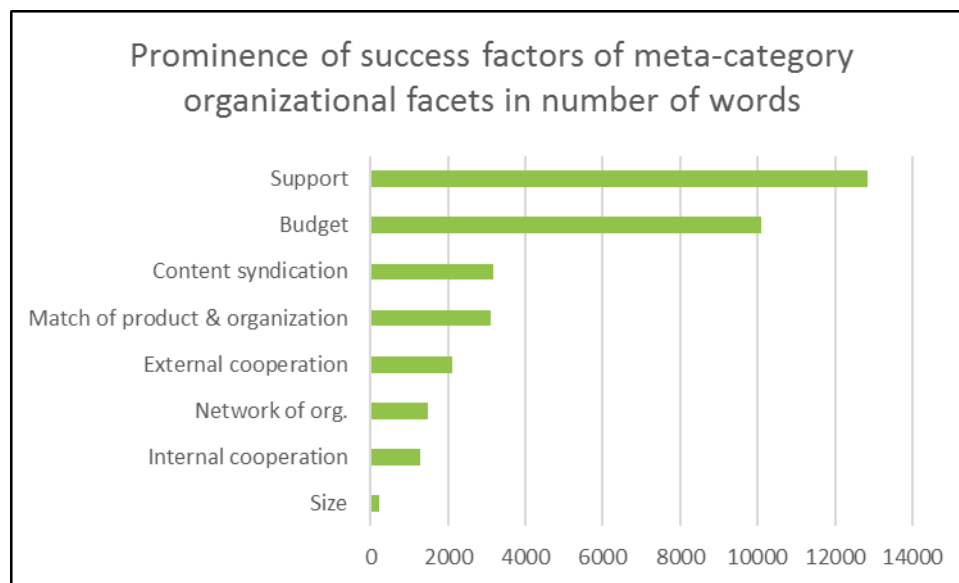
Internal processes make up the third-most discussed success factor. The budget for the project of a TV series and the available resources are the most debated success factors in this category and are elaborated upon in the subchapter on organization influences on TV series and in the section on TV series' budgets. Processes in development and production are also prominently discussed as enablers or constrainers of success and some evidencing statements are presented in subchapter 9.5. Regarding internal brand communication, the respondents at the top of the

hierarchy (developers) often describe successful alignments within the TV series' teams towards a common goal. Grisoni says, "if those people are on it, if those people are 100% committed, if those people are talking, discussing all the time about what they're doing and if they're passionate about it, that cannot fail to filter through everyone." Several writers mention negative instances; Kropf: "When inconsistencies creep in, because the [many] directors take liberties and interpret, it is not conducive to the series."

#### 10.3.4. Organizational Facets

Organizational facets form the most salient meta-category of success factors besides the study's central themes content and societal relevance.

Figure 17. Prominence of success factors of meta-category organization aspects in number of words



n=34'535 words

The organization's support for creators and their TV series is a logical frontrunner among the success factors. Ample evidence is provided in subchapters 9.5 to 9.7. In addition to the actual project budget that was discussed in the previous section, the budget of the organization can enable or constrain the success of series in the eyes of the interviewees. Advertising by the broadcaster is of importance, for instance. The writers and producers discuss the financial power of pay-TV organizations and – on a national level – of other broadcasters. Content syndication, co-production, -financing, -broadcasting and foreign sales of series are viable activities of the organization that do not always go well, as some respondents profess. External cooperation refers to more spontaneous, originally unplanned deals where another organization (Netflix, foreign PSBs) saves a series (e.g., *Rita*, *Tabula Rasa*) by investing in exchange for broadcasting rights. Careddu says about *Rocco*: "RAI 2 is the right broadcaster (...), there is a right connection between the show and



the broadcaster.” His series suits reputation and the audience of RAI 2 and brought in new viewers, he claims. Internal cooperation mostly refers to (the lack of) hurdles in the decision-making on TV series. Mosholt states about Netflix and DR: “So you know pretty early on, if you’re doing the show or not and you don’t have to deal with that many people in the process.”

### **10.3.5. Leadership**

Leadership is one of the least important meta-categories of success factors. Smith exemplifies how leadership ought to consist of enabling: “It is a combination of having the right writers and the right leaders. You have to get both of them right. Leadership and being encouraged to express yourself.” To writers and producers, the decision-making influence over TV series often rests with the ‘wrong’ people. The discussion on the absence of showrunners in the European scene is also place able in this realm. A more positive tendency regarding leadership stems from the discussion of successful projects headed by writers. Developers propagate the leadership they exercise on behalf of their PSBs. For more substantiation, also see subchapter 9.6.

### **10.3.6. Human Resources**

Human resources emerge as the least prominent of the meta-categories. The factors (see 7.2.6) are mainly discussed in the context of teamwork, but the concept of HR, like the one of leadership, does not transfer with any emphasis to the rather outstanding ways TV series are created. Competence is most prominent among the success factors in the category. Alber mentions hiring writers that have different core competences for her team of *Der Bestatter*. The reputation of the involved team members is of importance in the sense of having been part of ‘good’ products, as well as having cooperated in satisfactory ways with the other involved creatives. Irlé says:

“Bernard Yerlès, the main character, (...) is very famous, the kind of actor you know by face but not by name because he has done a TV career. (...) It really helped me to get a very good international sales representative.”

### **10.3.7. Marketing**

Marketing is the one of the most important meta-categories of success factors. In particular, marketing of TV series on the audience market is a salient topic. Interviewees judge the positioning of their series in relation to the market, similar products and the target audience. Grotenhuis emphasizes that his company already considers all (new) platforms in the development stage of a TV series.

Regarding advertising (the most salient success factor), respondents mention large advertising efforts as one of the reasons for the success of series. Fischer elaborates about *Der Bestatter*:

“On Facebook we have a site, intensely farmed by the PSB, also chats. The Swiss TV invests resources for advertising in it like in no other product. It is just enormous. We film a commercial every year.

They have a great advertising department and these want to push it hard, like Americans.”

Other respondents laud advertising by Netflix for *The Rain* and *Suburra*.

At times, audience market research is mentioned, but it does not seem to be a priority. In the light of the increasing importance of product placement, surprisingly few words are spent on marketing TV series to potential advertisers. The activity is often outsourced.

### **10.3.8. Distribution**

Distribution is, like marketing, for most respondents not part of their actual task and is thus less salient than could be logically expected from this core activity in the value chain. The meta-category of success factors ranks fifth out of nine in prominence.

Timing is most salient of the success factors of the category, which reflects that many discussed TV series are (originally) made for broadcasting in linear TV where time slots impact audience shares. Among others, Deroche-Miles, Smith, Kropf and Winger discern suboptimal ratings due to the unattractive time slot. The opposite is stated about dissemination of, e.g., Danish series in their domestic market on Sunday night. In addition, horizontal programming evokes audience expectations in connection with specific time slots. Fischer and Alber of *Der Bestatter* describe the initial apprehension in the creative team about the assigned time slot that was traditionally filled with German crime series. The slot proved to be a benefit; *Der Bestatter* raked in the large core audience of the slot and attracted new viewers. Timing is also of importance in the sense of picking the right season and date for premieres of new series.

The new media landscape shows itself in the salience of multi-platform distribution as a success factor. Foremost, the increase in potential outlets is discussed: Hermans says, “In our newest dreams we also see (...) what we call hybrid-programs, programs we can distribute on digital and linear, (...) in different forms, shapes and lengths.” This positive potential is to an extent encumbered by the simultaneous increase in supply side competition on the TV series market. Syndication of TV series to other channels and platforms and catch-up of TV series through online players substantially add to the audience of series.

The least prominent success factor is optimization for the audience, which is not (yet) relevant. TV series are distributed more or less in their original form. Some respondents describe varying the episodes’ length to suit additional broadcasters.

### **10.3.9. External Evaluation**

External evaluation ranks behind distribution and before form/design as meta-category of success factors. The factors pertain to resonance of the product, which creators for the most part do not control. Word-of-mouth is the most important success factor. Scherfig says, “The Bridge was a Word-of-Mouth success, you can say. Because there was no big market presentation of it or a campaign.” A salient element

is generating a 'buzz' by deploying social media. In most cases, the broadcasters farm the social media presence of the series. Creators mention awards as contributing to success, but reviews carry more weight. However, some respondents see the audience's taste strongly diverging from critics' opinions. Media coverage is the least salient of the factors of the category. Berggren wants actors that are attractive to talk shows. Schweizer laments the media coverage on new TV series that are not yet available to the domestic audience.

#### **10.4. Measures of Success**

Creators interpret the success of TV series in various ways, as the data show. Early in the process, a prominent first instance of success for writers and producers is the actual realization of a script or a project. To a large share of the respondents, the main reference frame consists of decision makers at broadcasters.

The most commonly mentioned criterion of success is as expected: high ratings, market shares, large audiences. The market shares need to be seen, however, in relation to the audience potential of the broadcaster, the channel, and the time slot. Writers and producers hardly ever express any substantial knowledge of audiences. Exact audience numbers and (long-tail) sales turnover (additional broadcasting and distribution platforms) are largely unknown to most respondents, except for the high-ranking developers. After realization of a script, success is also measured by the prolongation of a series, by international syndication and remakes.

Qualitative indicators of audience involvement/identification with the product are also regularly expressed as an indicator of success, on occasion also in the sense of contributing to public debate. Success is, by some, measured by the extent to which the involved team members are acknowledged in the industry or among peers as creators of an important TV series, a work of craft, art or a communication vehicle. Another measure of success is positive external evaluations: reviews, awards, festival invitations. Reputation effects for the involved creators among production companies and broadcasters, like series becoming a 'calling card' of a broadcaster, positive and organization-internal prestige are additional success criteria.

The respondents seldom mentioned financial gains or profits as an indicator of success. This perhaps reflects the way these creators are mostly compensated: lump sums for finished projects or a wage for the running time of a series.

Developers in the service of PSBs focus more on audience numbers and market shares than other respondents do. In addition, the success measures of serving the audience and fulfilling the mandate by offering innovative, debate-provoking, edifying or high-quality TV series emerge. Enhancing the reputation of the PSB is a success measure as well.

#### **10.5. Overview: Perceived Success Factors of TV Series and Success**

- Content → main success factor: adaption to audience, quality, genre, and stars
- Form → not large success factor, production value (investment) of importance
- Environmental orientation → moderate success factor: home audience, language, market and societal environment
- Internal processes → moderate success factor: budget, development and production processes
- Organizational facets → most important of generic meta-categories of success factors: support, budget, cooperation
- Leadership → not large success factor: controversially discussed. Leadership by writers lauded, often 'wrong' leaders
- HR → least prominent meta-category: competence important
- Marketing → important success factor: positioning on audience market
- Distribution → marginal success factor: not part of task of respondents. Timing and platforms of interest
- External evaluation → moderate success factor: word-of-mouth most prominent
- Success → realization of series, ratings, feedback by peers and audience, reputation, impact on discourse

## **11. The Creators' Perception of Societal Relevance as Success Factor**

In overview, a country-based pattern emerges in the data. Societal relevance appears closely intertwined with the national socio-political and -cultural environment. Per country, the currently salient issues as well as the perception on long-standing problems vary. The influences exerted by the strategies and policies of domestic broadcasters pertaining to the inclusion of societal relevance and the relationship between creators and the main domestic players differ per country. The results show a degree of uniformity within the various national markets, except for the creators from the UK, the larger and more matured TV series industry. The data gathered for Scandinavian creators on the one hand, and for Belgian and Dutch interviewees on the other, overlap to a larger extent. It follows that I present some of the results by country (Switzerland, Germany, Italy, The UK, and Canada) and other results by region (Scandinavia, Belgium/The Netherlands). Pertaining to each country/region, I present the elements that respondents consider societally relevant and I establish in how far the interviewees perceived these as success factors. The longer subchapters I divide into three separate sections, the shorter ones into two sections.

### **11.1. The Swiss Creators and Expert**

Compared to the interviewees from other countries, the Swiss respondents appear to have fewer considerations pertaining to societally relevant mediation in TV series. It does apparently not figure very prominently in the creative process, and the interviewees were to some extent surprised by the topic. After being introduced to some concrete examples (*Borgen*, *House of Cards* and mediation on politics, *Sex and the City* and gender issues, *The Wire* and socio-political issues), the respondents grasped the concept better and designated societally relevant elements to their own and other series. It was subsequently easier for interviewees to determine to what extent the discussed societally relevant elements contribute to the success of (their) TV series.

#### **11.1.1. Elements of Societal Relevance**

Socio-cultural topics emerge as prominent among the Swiss interviewees and are societally relevant to an extent. Respondents specify, firstly, the attempt to palate a taboo – allegedly deeply engrained in Swiss society and culture – surrounding death and suicide. Fitze says: “I want us to have societal relevance, for example, the way we deal with death, with this undertaker, and with the passage: we have to treat this subject sincerely.”

Focusing on people and areas seldom portrayed on national TV is by several interviewees considered as a societally relevant element. “It is a conscious choice to set it in Argovia. It is never setting of series because it is allegedly boring, but 90% of

Switzerland is like that and many of the crime cases indeed occur there" (Alber). In the same vein, Mayor refers to a TV series about garbage men.

Closely related to the portrayal of less often portrayed people is the use of local dialects. This is, however, problematic, because "the dialect is never right. It is never how they feel they speak. This then creates distance again and Swiss films are then by many viewers labeled as stupid" (Fitze).

After comparing it to the German series *Tatort*, Alber says the creators of *Der Bestatter* tried incorporating important topics in their series as well: organized crime and the illegal trade in donor organs. Respondents regard controversial topics as (potentially) societally relevant because they can evoke audience reflection and discussion. The respondents named law and order and violent crime, refugees and immigration, abuse of staff, corruption, corporate greed and fraudulent banking, sexual discrimination, self-determined death, domestic violence, new public management and cost cutting, repossession of property, loss of home and identity, vigilantism and self-justice. The topics are, in the eyes of some interviewees, included to achieve a degree of realism: "We want to show Switzerland as it currently is and not another rosy yet boring portrayal" (Alber). Not all respondents adhere to realism. The focus is for some more on displaying plausible ('true') emotions and evoking involvement and identification on part of viewers, which can also be achieved in an unrealistic background.

### **11.1.2. Societal Relevance and Success**

A socio-cultural facet contributes to the success of two discussed products: the specific regional settings of the TV series (*Der Bestatter* and *Station Horizon*). Fitze contemplates:

"It is set in Switzerland, not in Berne, Zurich or Basel, but in Argovia, the middle of the country, they are people like me and you, they talk like me and you, and that is something that the Swiss and the SRF audience appreciates. They get the feeling that it has something to do with them; it concerns them too for once. There are weird cases like the trade in donor organs that don't really occur there, but in other stories the viewers recognize themselves."

Respondents emphasize the high involvement of viewers with local settings and see the cultural proximity of TV series' content and audience as a success factor:

"These locations are recognizable for the people. Valley du Rhône, which is the main valley of Wallis, is definitely somewhere where most Swiss-French have been to. It is an area that is very loved by people because this is where we go to ski, this is where we go on our weekends. It is connected with positive associations." (Irlé)

As an indicator of the involvement, Argovian viewers lamented online the inaccuracy of certain details in *Der Bestatter*, such as using the wrong ambulances, says Alber.

Congruent with the regional setting is the deployment of local dialect ('Mundart'). Fitze elaborates: "One of the essential success factors (...) is dialect. So that it is close to the people, it involves them when characters speak like them." Mayor agrees that the deployment of what is perceived as the people's language adds something to the appeal of fiction.

Alber emphasizes the playful treatment of a laden topic: "one distances oneself with irony or humor from death. But (...) it is shown, it is not completely tabooed." The treatment of the unmentionable is fruitful and contributes to the success of *Der Bestatter*. In general, most respondents do not think that controversial topics contribute to the appeal of series. According to Schweizer, societal relevance emerges only where topics are portrayed that concern the viewers personally, and this is seldom the case in imported TV series. These imported products need to rely on universal human themes to be successful, in addition to a range of other qualities.

### **11.1.3. Distinctions along Subsamples**

All respondents are employed or commissioned by PSBs, and none by advertising-based channels or pay-TV. The differences and similarities along subsamples are thus confined to distinctions between respondents with varying roles and extent of authority in decision-making: editors, producers, and developers. Writers are not represented, but Alber has experience in the role, and so do, to some extent, Fischer and Lüthi. From top to bottom, the hierarchical order is two section heads (Fitze and Mayor), three producers or project supervisors (Alber is employed by the PSB, Irlé and Fischer are external producers), and an editor (project co-worker) Lüthi. The procurement manager Schweizer is not involved in the discussed series.

The developers (Mayor and Fitze) stand out among the respondents. They attach somewhat more value to the discussion of societal relevance and to treatment of potentially relevant topics in series. The section heads state the intention to integrate societal relevance in the shape of socio-political issues in future projects. However, like the other respondents, the developers do not connect societally relevant elements strongly to audience success. For them the main motivation is related to the PSB mandate, with targets like edification, evoking public discussions, etc.

### **11.1.4. Overview**

- Cultural proximity to domestic audience is most important success factor (language, customs, scenery, regional/local color, recognizable Swiss characters and stars)
- Most respondents: referencing domestic issues enhances identification and thus audience appeal
- These issues are to most respondents not necessarily 'societally relevant'

- Social topics pertaining to Swiss target audience are merely secondary success factor
- Societally relevant issues in foreign TV series at times admired, but not important for success
- To over half of respondents, societal relevance is in general not important for success
- To less than half: societal relevance enhances success chance somewhat
- Main social segregators: ethnicity/nationality and sexuality mentioned
- No treatment of gender issues

## 11.2. The Scandinavian Creators

The contact information of the initial interview partners from Scandinavia was supplied by the organizer of a TV series festival. Afterwards, snowball sampling was deployed. The interviews were held in English and language problems did not surface. The main questions and themes of the interview seemed not unfamiliar to the respondents, and it was not necessary to exemplify TV series with ‘societally relevant’ content elements. The respondents had no difficulties translating societal relevance into actual content elements, nor were they lost for words regarding these elements’ contribution to success of TV series.

### 11.2.1. Elements of Societal Relevance

The Scandinavian creators share many opinions on societal relevance in TV series. Social, socio-political or -cultural issues are regarded as integral to the produced dramas and crime stories (comedies were not discussed); “it is essential” and “if it is not about people and their (...) troubles, what then?” says Gabold. TV series “cannot really do without” socio-political issues, confirms Widman, if one wants to show believable conflict and dilemmas. The important topic of the changing gender roles can also be shown in e.g., love stories, he adds. Scherfig says:

“In Scandinavia, we have a tradition about making society criticism in our crime stories. It is an old tradition, going back to our values. We have this big tradition that our crime stories are not just crime stories; there are also comments about what is going on in our world now. When we started [our series *The Bridge*], there was a big part of it, we thought why is this important right now? What is happening right now in the world?”

Societal relevance can emerge with realistic portrayals, several respondents claim. “We are very close to reality,” says Gabold. Berggren explains that for his series on corrupt police officers, he hired a convicted former policeman as a story consultant. Realism can, but does not have to, entail actual places, times, events, persons, as well as modes of acting, filming, lighting and settings. Mosholt says



about *The Rain*: “It was very important to us that people believe the universe and that it looks real. So that it not just looks like roleplaying in the forest.”

Gylling relates realism rather to portrayals of characters: “For the broad audience, realism is a big thing. I prefer (...) authenticity. Realism in connecting to the basic emotional stuff. (...). It is not realism, but the characters are real. That is the most important.” Berggren diverges from the common opinion on realism: “To talk about daily life and struggle and creepy gray faces? I think we need to look to Hollywood and the larger-than-life storytelling. Social realism is the easiest part to do. I don’t like it”. Ahlgren adheres partly to realistic portrayals, but the crimes in his series are not. He sums up: “We are larger than life, but we also want to say something about our society.”

The interviewees emphasize the incorporation of a second main multi-episodic plot in TV series. One of the two main plots reflects on societal problems and issues in the homeland of the production, the broadcaster and the audience. It focuses on “the people and the problems they face,” says Gabold. Scherfig explains: the Danish and Swedish PSBs “operate with an element called the ‘double story.’ You have to have both; you have to have an entertainment story but also a story which reflects on the pulse of the time right now.” Mosholt illuminates the societally relevant second story principle at PSB (DR) series as well: “That’s very much in the DNA of what DR is doing. It (...) seeps through in the way we tell stories.” Gram adds: “The stories we tell in our [DR] shows always (...) relate to Danish society at this very moment in time.”

Wännström adapted a successful Dutch series for a commercial broadcaster and points to the necessary adaptation of plot elements to the social fabric of Swedish society. However, in *Gåsmamman*, she states: “We didn’t have a second story. (...). But in a way it is telling something about our society as well, in the family part.” Østerbye’s series, *Rita*, portrays a teacher. It runs on an ad-based network (and on Netflix). “The school is a great venue because we could do all kinds of people and all kinds of income classes in (...) one context. (...). It is more important to go and look for other places than (...) the middle-class,” Østerbye says.

Discussing current ‘hot’ issues and/or long-term social phenomena relevant to the ‘home’ country and primary audience of the TV series is essential, say many Scandinavian creators. The more local you are, the more universally relevant the content becomes. Gylling says about her DR series: “We made the characters to reflect all of Denmark, all the staff cultures in Denmark.” Berggren says about *Elven*: “We were telling a true story about the living up North.”

The issues integrated in the discussed series range from political and economic corruption, environmental problems, dehumanization and automation, to trade in weapons, slaving of women, financial fraud, physical and mental abuse, work pressure, gender roles, etc. Gram paints the finance industry in his series in none too flattering colors and depicts greed, deception and violence. Berggren mentions making a series for kids that tackled the processing of death. He also portrays the police as the ‘bad guys.’ In *Elven*, Berggren tackled “the Cold War and the secret structures within the society where the military has a lot of power.” Mosholt portrays

an environmental disaster and a subsequent collapse of the societal structures. Scherfig and Ahlgren rake in a multitude of socio-political issues in *The Bridge*. The series also makes a point about the newer disparities between the two countries. Gabold portrays the gender roles in Scandinavia in a new multilingual thriller. He has his protagonist take actions that are unbelievable in other settings, like forsaking his long-lost daughter who was adopted by a new family. Other development projects deal with the trade in faked medicine, the war in Serbia, and terrorism by Bible belt Christians. Widman says about his product, “Real Humans is a kind of escapism. But it still handles and discusses ordinary problems, social problems.” Gåsmamman is about a family dealing soft drugs. With respect to others’ series, the interviewees highlight various social dramas and the topics these tackle.

Societal relevance is not only about topics. Gram incorporates dark immoral (and female) characters in *Borgen* as well as in *Follow the Money*. Staying within the boundaries of a genre does not exclude canvassing dark pictures of family life, as in *The Legacy*, he says. He sees a lot of deviance of (petite and grand) bourgeois values in TV series.

### 11.2.2. Societal Relevance and Success

The Scandinavian interviewees are amongst the country-based subsamples the most convinced of the contribution of societal relevance to success of series: social issues and topics, observations, realism and socio-political critique are all largely important. Gabold illustrates this with one of his series: “You have one story obviously about politics, about the first woman president in Denmark. [In the other story] it is shown that she is something special.” He sees the strong identification of women with the main protagonist of the series as a worldwide phenomenon. He insists that the series could have only been made in Scandinavia: it springs from the society and reflects the socio-cultural tradition in minute detail. Mosholt thinks that the international success of *Borgen* stems from a portrayal of women that is realistic in Denmark, but at best an ambition in other societies. In the same vein, Gabold says about another series: “Because of the way we have developed our democracies in Scandinavia, we have men who would make that choice.” Nowhere else, the portrayed action would make any sense. Other Scandinavian interviewees describe local as well as universal appeal coming into existence as a result of realistic portrayals of people and their problems.

The success of science fiction series stems (also) from the realistic and critical portrayal of the future. Questions many people think about, says Widman, are addressed: “What is technology doing with us as humans and with our society? (...). If it is possible to program – in a digital way – something that is just like us, what then makes us human?” *The Bridge* uses a range of socio-political phenomena as a plot backdrop and covers topics such as gender roles and family. The chemistry between the main characters stands for the Danish-Swedish relations in general and plays with the mutual prejudices. This was one of the keys to audience success, says Gabold. Gram connects the local character of series to their success: “the reason we

got success with *Borgen* and *The Killing*, (...) was that they were telling very Danish stories. They were telling crime stories in a very Danish way, very much about the Danish society, it was very local.” Out of the exact portrayal of local life grows international success, he thinks. Scherfig confirms, “I think you have to be really ambitious in a local way and after that there is going to be an international interest.” Gylling agrees as well: “I think the more local, the more global [the series is].” She explains how the universality comes about: identification is connected to characters in fiction, and as a viewer, “you have to [be able to] mirror yourself in the characters. If you don’t connect to them and don’t recognize anything in their problems or their lives, then you’re not interested.”

Some creators put the connection of societal relevance, realism and success in perspective. Gram, for example, points out that the mainstream audience success in Denmark becomes a niche audience success abroad, which is, according to Lüthi, also due to subtitling:

“The fact that [the Danish series, *Borgen*, *The Killing*] deal so much with society will probably not be that mainstream. At least in countries where the TV shows are very much the typical American crime story, our shows will seem quite challenging.” (Gram)

Berggren says, “I think we were too realistic. (...). I think it is dangerous to be socially realistic. (...). They [the audience] don’t want real life. They want some bigger problems.” Gabold says potential broadcasters rejected his series about faked medicine because the central problem ventured too far from crime genre requirements. Wännström had to tone down the drug dealing in her series: “The drug problem, we had a lot of discussions about how to tackle that. Because even when... I mean, we tried to keep some of the things from the Dutch series that makes ours stand out a little. Not to be too politically correct.” The promotion of the series through social media was hindered by the topic. Politics as the main plot is perhaps too challenging for audiences, she feels.

### **11.2.3. Distinctions along Subsamples**

The influence of the DR is, due to its accomplishments, enormous in the European TV series production sector. The critical, audience and export success of several of the Danish TV series (*The Killing*, *Borgen*, *The Bridge* are the earlier and best-known examples) inspired investigation by scholars like Redvall (2013). It follows that the deliberations at the heart of the development and the production processes behind the series and at the commissioning PSB have set a precedent in Denmark, in other countries in Scandinavia, and to some extent in the rest of Europe.

The financing and greenlighting Swedish and Danish public service broadcasters require social and/or socio-political issues in series, claim several interviewees (Gabold, Widman, Gram, Scherfig, Mosholt). The term ‘double story’ entails a societally relevant narrative (the “second story”) that addresses social issues in some form, as literally all respondents commissioned by PSBs in Scandinavia confirm. Gram says, “DR wants (...) to tell (...) stories that are important to society.

That is very attractive to a writer." This is not dominated by specific political persuasions: "Your shows have to have world views that can fit society as a whole. That also means that [even] if I have a very leftist or very elitist view of the world, my show cannot [portray it]." His (and other 'good') series focus on the individual characters. The incorporation of the necessary second (societally relevant) story should not result in edifying TV, he observes.

If the second, societally relevant story, says Gram,

"is not present in a pitch, then it will not be green-lighted at DR. You can go to TV 2 and you can probably get green-lighted there if it is a good story. But at DR they will ask you, what is the double story?"

Scherfig says that DR found politics a good arena for drama and consented to producing *Borgen*. A Scandinavian writer gives a prosaic reason for the emphasis of DR on societally relevant storytelling: "Concepts have to have some sort of relevance to use 8 million Danish Kroner." Gylling used to think that "the best place you can work is DR. Because you get the freedom and you are allowed to be a bit edgy, you can be critical, you can be dark and deep and everything you want to be." However, the creator adds that the differences between broadcasters have become smaller lately.

A Scandinavian writer states that ad-based broadcasters are less inclined to have controversial topics included: "They have what they call the 'core values.' (...). They use the term togetherness.' (...). That's why if you do it with a lot of edge they are not interested because it alienates their picture of their common audience". Østerbye's series *Rita* is relatively successful, but causes some controversy at the ad-based network as well:

"There are some aspects of Rita's character that are very provocative, smoking, sex and telling teachers off. (...). I know that the broadcaster had a lot of struggles with it. (...). The most successful show on TV 2 is called 'The Hotel by the Sea' [a nostalgic series about the upper class]. It is another realm than Rita and it doesn't have that kind of everyday realism that Rita has. (...). Rita is not as popular as the Hotel."

Scherfig says that the ad-based broadcaster "obviously wants a connection to society and family values," but interprets it differently than the PSB. Berggren says that the Norwegian ad-based networks are "concerned about the values and doing some decent things."

Some of the creators have experiences in supplying pay-TV channels with content, often in the shape of a co-production (Østerbye, Scherfig, Ahlgren, and Wännström). Mosholt produced *The Rain* for Netflix Denmark. No specific preference for societally relevant content is made out, but leeway is given to creators. Mosholt says about his post-apocalyptic story:

"The Scandinavian model of society is very linear, (...). The idea of the perfect welfare society, we as Scandinavians take pride in that. And we just wanted to see what would happen if you took the whole system away. If we were still these human beings that we believe ourselves to be or would we become something else?"

Regarding the different roles in production of TV, no large distinctions are uncovered. The developer and the writers are verbal about societal relevance and elaborate more than the producers do.

#### 11.2.4. Overview

- Scandinavian creators most convinced of societal relevance as success factor
- Few creators doubt causality of societal relevance for success
- Success: current and/or long-term issues relevant to domestic audience are essential → precision and authenticity lead to universality of success
- Key is second main multi-episodic plot in TV series
- Success: societal relevance contributes to realization of TV series: PSBs demand reflection on society, societal issues, in TV series
- Success: social issues enhance audience involvement
- Many societally relevant topics in TV series: social issues and topics, observations, realism and socio-political critique
- Societal relevance emerges automatically in realistic depictions
- A minority of respondents prefers other ways of storytelling
- Ad-based broadcasters hesitant about audience-alienating topics → integration of decent human values
- In pay-TV no tendency towards social issues, but creative freedom is large → societally relevant content dependent on creators

### 11.3. The Quebec Creator

#### 11.3.1. Societal Relevance and Success

The Quebec developer Beraud has a lot of experience and produced series in Canada and the USA. He had no problem with the topic of societal relevance and could determine the contribution to the success of certain contents. He describes how the topic of women in prison suddenly appeared simultaneously in TV series from the US, Australia and Canada. His current series *Unit 9* focuses on plausible social issues faced by women. The prison setting of the narrative heightens the immediacy of problems. This constitutes societal relevance in his eyes. The series has become more “edgy” and has increased its social commentary over the years. It is not moralistic but does reflect the Quebec society strongly.

Overall, the series he supervises have as origin a “very basic human approach, they’re all universal. (...). [The universality is] adapted to reflect the society we’re in.” According to him, realism is not a condition for societal relevance:

“Babe, the pig, speaks! (...). You believe in it because it was an element of truth (...) where it was about going against established predators. (...). In our society, sometimes you want to get out of what is assigned to you, so we could relate to it.”

Regarding success, the interviewee states that the production of series is “a business of failure”. He refers to the uncertainty of series production. The developer thinks that series become a success when “people can relate to them [the characters] and can project themselves into them even when the character is not politically correct or somebody that you don’t want to be.” This is the case for female viewers and his latest series. This process also explains the success of *Breaking Bad*, where the main protagonist does “everything right to be a good American and then you can still get screwed by the system.”

Beraud points to the types of series popular in different eras and claims that touching a nerve in society can also be achieved with social or political messages. Social criticism in series can, if done well, attract viewers. This content also evokes more reputational effects than other script elements, a measure of success. In general, he believes in the success potential of adapting universal themes to local conditions, thus reflecting basic human issues (the essence of storytelling), as well as societies and their pitfalls.

### 11.3.2. Overview

- Portrayals of plausible social issues of (domestic audience) groups are societally relevant
- Success by adapting universal themes to local conditions → reflecting basic human issues, society and its pitfalls
- Realism is not necessary for success

## 11.4. The UK Creators and Experts

In general, the respondents from the UK had no difficulty grasping the main topics of the interview and did not need elaborate examples of what societal relevance can entail. The interviewees diverge in their opinions wider from each other than the respondents from other countries do.

### 11.4.1. Elements of Societal Relevance

The range of societally relevant topics is wide, but often rather vaguely described: “Stories which are to do with your world, your society”. Societal relevance is to some interviewees (Smith, Grisoni, and Deroche-Miles) social, ‘tough,’ ‘gritty’ and/or realistic drama, and can entail issues of social division, underprivileged social environments, mental and sexual abuse, skewed gender roles, etc. Writer Grisoni says, series are relevant that mediate “some sense of danger. Some sense that the

status quo is being challenged. Some sense that what you feel safe with, what you know, has been faked up.” Festival programmer Deroche-Miles points to amorality as a culturally relevant element of high-end series. Gallagher works on a series about the privatization of the National Health Service.

Realism is societally relevant but can take on different forms for Grisoni: “If you go into [a character’s] head and see the world as that character (...). It may not be social realism. But it is a form of realism.” Realistic actions can also take place in fairy tales. His series *Southcliffe* adheres to social realism. Personal visions on society’s deficits are inherently relevant, says writer Smith. For Deroche-Miles, another version of societal relevance is found in lifeworld series like *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*. These series address the salient problems of big groups and offer highly moralistic resolutions.

Unsurprisingly, most interviewees emphasize universal human emotions and dilemmas as the most important content. For the consultant Wood and the writer Gallagher, who both do not see much value in social criticism as component of entertainment, emotional dilemmas are societally relevant exactly because these appeal to the audience, a reversed argumentation.

Regarding genres, drama obviously stands out as mediator of germane topics, but Smith sees comedy as potentially societally relevant: “The great (...) comedies mark on a social change and social attitudes.” He wrote a children’s series about “disabled kids and their issues” and thinks that in drama most of the time the creators and distributors play very safe and mediate little of societal importance.

#### **11.4.2. Societal Relevance and Success**

The interviewees see societal relevance as a success factor under specific conditions, for certain formats, at certain broadcasters, only partly, or not at all. To Deroche-Miles and Smith, societal relevance needs to be about the UK itself to be an audience success in the country: “People have to have something British. Because of their culture, because of the way they’re brought up in school here which is very Anglo-centered, (...) they have to find their own values and culture represented in the series” (Deroche-Miles). Wood does not think so, TV series appeal to many who are not from the creators’ or broadcasters’ native lands. Smith says, “as long as it is true to our experiences” success might be achieved. He adds, “a successful drama isn’t going to be parochial. It might (...) have all the local color, but the story must be a universal story.”

Incorporating societal relevance and realistic notions is a significant success factor for specific broadcasters and channels, say Grisoni, Smith and Deroche-Miles. The latter sees it also as a success factor of the extremely successful and long-running soaps, which also have an edifying function. She says, “Channel 4 has regularly had quite a few TV series (...) on very harsh social environments, social problems and the difficulties that young people in particular have”. Social commentary is “a pass to getting the programmers, the commissioners interested” at BBC and Channel 4.

In contrast, integrating social critique and harsh problems can also cause broadcasters to bail out of a project or a distribution deal, Deroche-Miles says.

Although “people like complex characters and they want to be surprised and (...) disturbed,” in recent years the prominence of social issues on regular TV has decreased strongly:

“Things about (...) the abuse of children in care centers (...), serious programs, things which really moved people and asked fundamental questions about the kind of society this country is, (...) seem to have disappeared. [Now] you have *Downton Abbey*, *Mrs. Selfridge*. It is escapism, (...) not (...) demanding” [at prime-time TV].

She gets very enervated about the audience taste for nostalgia and almost pities the broadcasters fighting for ratings. The key to the audience lies, to her, in the fact that viewers in practice choose a varied menu of conformist, bland, and insignificant, yet presumably entertaining TV series, in combination with challenging and relevant content. Smith says, “Some nights you just fancy pizza, some nights you want to go to a really new, cutting edge restaurant.”

Wood sees addressing social issues as just one, rather hard to access, route to audience success. Realism is a rarity and is in itself not a success factor, she claims. In that light, she sees successful Scandinavian violent crime stories as unrealistic: “It is because everything is so pristine in the [Scandinavian] society. They have to recognize the dark side to (...) balance things out.” Success can stem from content presenting controversy and danger to audiences living in safety, but authenticity is the main factor. Viewers must empathize. Grisoni refers to realism and authenticity: “It is a way of inviting you into a world and making it a believable world.” Gallagher leans toward human relationships and challenges as an audience success factor. The adherence to truth and the resulting exact portrayal of human life does incorporate social issues and is, if all goes well, a success factor.

### 11.4.3. Distinctions along Subsamples

The respondents do not distinguish clearly between broadcasters. The niche channels BBC 2, BBC 4 (digital channel) and Channel 4 are singled out as having the greatest interest in programming ‘societally relevant’ content, but also BBC 1 and ITV are mentioned as offering possibilities to produce controversial topics. Gallagher points at constraints: he wanted to make his series *Crusoe* like *12 Years a Slave* (a critical film about race relations), but the ad-based US network wanted *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

The opinions do not vary systematically along functions. The expert Wood and the writer Gallagher are more inclined to underplay the significance of societally relevant content. The others (the writers Grisoni and Smith and the festival programmer Deroche-Miles) vary in interpretation of societal relevance but value it more. They also find social commentary more of a success factor of series than Wood and Gallagher do.



#### 11.4.4. Overview

- Human emotions and dilemmas most essential
- Societally relevant topics mainly in abstract terms discussed
- Some topics critically reflect current situation in UK: class divisions, poverty, income disparity, abuse, violence.
- Realism is societally relevant, but no consensus on interpretation.
- Strong variation in answers to question of societal relevance as success factor
- Domestic social issues are to some respondents success factor for acceptance of projects, as well as for audience resonance
- Others: social issues are difficult, scare broadcasters and construct audience, → counterproductive for success
- To some: broadcasters should fulfil simultaneous demand for relevant content and inconspicuous entertainment
- No systematic differences between business models or roles emerge pertaining to societal relevance and success

#### 11.5. The German Creators

The German interviewees were individually recruited based on the participants list of a TV series workshop. The small number of respondents and topical statements renders a distinction along subsamples in a separate section superfluous.

##### 11.5.1. Societal Relevance: Elements and Success

The respondents show an extent of agreement on what societally relevant content of series is. Writer Kropf names realistic social and political issues, producer Winger mentions the same types of issues and adds socio-cultural topics that may inspire a discussion among viewers. His series focuses on the Cold War, and the coming of age of the protagonist in between the two former German states. Writer Terjung emphasizes legal dilemmas and, related to these, ethical-philosophical questions. One episode of his procedural series played with the question of why it is acceptable (in society, as well as at the ad-based broadcaster where controversial discussions took place) to kill animals, but not to have sex with them. In general, his lawyer series offers an alternative and comic perspective on current social (class) relations, Terjung says. He likes writing procedurals because all types of issues are open to treatment in the genre.

The production culture did in the past not facilitate societally relevant contents, a respondent thinks. He describes a strong tendency to copy what is successful in the US and in Denmark. As a by-product, also socially critical topics were imported. In the series *Tatort*, social commentary is part of the concept that is largely maintained. In current series (*Bad Banks*, *Das Boot*), Kropf detects original societally relevant

themes. Terjung sees the impact of social issues in TV series hampered with by broadcasters' interference with the storytelling. Societally relevant content comes into being only when the 'unique' vision of the creator is realized, all three interviewees agree. Winger believes that TV narratives of late have a big impact. He mentions *The Wire* and *Modern Family*. The former influenced opinion leaders, the latter evoked acceptance of gay parenting. *Deutschland 83* made people reminisce about the nuclear threat in the 80s and at present.

The interviewees find that societal relevance heightens the involvement of audiences, but none feels it is the most important success factor. For Kropf, other content qualities rate more strongly (plausibility of script and acting, attractiveness of the main protagonists) and must be met first. One of the success factors of *Der letzte Bulle* was the humorous 80s-style political incorrectness demonstrated by a stuck-in-time protagonist. However, to exert the influence of this feature, first the acting, scripts, etc. had to be of highest quality. Winger and Terjung think that societal relevance can be an important second-order success factor, as topicality and realism heighten identification by viewers. In this light, domestic relevant issues resonate better in the audience than extraneous ones: "People watch a lot of US series. But they also long for something that has roots in the home land," says Kropf.

Strongly emphasized regional references (and dialects) can bring the native audience to the product, but drive others away, he says. For Winger, the audience needs to be captivated before it can process complicated critical messages. Whether the engagement is triggered depends on other factors: skillful storytelling, keeping people on edge, familiarity as well as surprise. In a market where products must find an audience, societal relevance is an additional lure that also might attract (social) media attention.

Realism stands out as an important factor to all interviewees. The portrayed conflicts and emotions must be realistic and authentic. Winger sees chances for realistic 'societally relevant' German topics on the international market and relates this to the new and improved standing of Germany as political and economic heavyweight in the international discourse.

Distinctions along business models are drawn. Two interviewees supply ad-based networks with their series, one was commissioned by a PSB. Of the three, Winger is most satisfied with his product on RTL. He does see a mismatch between his series and the regular ad-based channel's audience. He says the channel let the creators express what they intended. Terjung has many misgivings about the extremely careful and reserved attitude the ad-based channel of his series had: "They always want moralistic resolution. (...) The audience can make up their own mind." He speaks from experience that the same happens at PSBs. In general, PSBs ought to be more open to challenging social topics, all find.

### 11.5.2. Overview

- Societal relevance is realistic socio-political and -cultural, legal ethical-question topics
- Typical German production culture and interference by PSBs and ad-based broadcasters constrains creativity and societally relevant contents
- All respondents: societally relevant content emerges where creators' vision is allowed to domineer
- Societal relevance is secondary success factor → heightens the involvement and identification, can enhance marketing and attention for series but other factors that engage audiences take priority
- Domestic issues resonate more than imported topics, but should not be restrictive towards audience appeal
- Realism, authenticity of treatment of social issues are important, also on international market
- Two interviewees lament constraints at PSBs and ad-based broadcasters
- Ad-based core audience not ideal for one respondent's product
- PSBs ought to take more risks in commissioning TV series

## 11.6. The Italian Creators

In the case of Italy, snowball sampling was administered through the Italian screenwriters' guild: four out of five respondents were recruited after the guild established contact with them and asked for their cooperation. The developer in the service of the PSB was contacted directly. The interviews were conducted in English. Due to lacking language skills, it was not equally easy for all interviewees to formulate what societal relevance is, and what it translates to in their own TV series. Examples were again mentioned to illustrate societally relevant TV series' contents.

### 11.6.1. Societal Relevance: Elements and Success

The respondents name several 'societally relevant' ingredients of TV series they worked on. The PSB developer Andreatta sees societal relevance in the filming of Italian literature, to mediate modern and historical Italian culture. She mentions "social" soaps (the longest-running soap opera in Europe) and treatment of the Ndrangheta (mobsters) in other specific productions. The hugely successful

"My Brilliant Friend (...) is an epic tale of female friendship that covers over sixty years of Italian history and touches universal themes and feelings such as the female point of view, and the possibility of emancipation from violence and misery through education".

If success is defined as fulfilling the "mission" of a "universal" PSB, the products all contribute to it, says Andreatta, "because we cannot and must not marginalize or leave behind the weaker sectors of the audience, but the same goes for the more up-to-date and demanding sector." The commissioner points at the audience and critical

success of RAI fiction but does not establish a direct relation between societal relevance and audience success; other factors are probably more important.

The creative producer of *The Medici*, Ramosino, assigns integrative functions to hagiographic narratives, a format that is an Italian/RAI tradition:

“There is (...) a level where you can try and promote culture. Work on the classics, to make sure that people can have contact with them. It could also be a really interesting way to include the immigrants. If they don’t get to know our culture, it is something that is lost for them; (...) stories are our tool to create a connection and meeting people.”

Societal relevance is, however, not per se limited to emancipating, democratic, or culture-promoting notions. The main protagonist of the series *Rocco Schiavone* offers self-justice and vigilante-style solutions to an audience allegedly frustrated with ‘lax justice,’ as writer Careddu says:

“Rocco is not the classical hero, he’s a very different hero, because he’s a thief and smokes marijuana and he’s also a judge. (...). He has a personal law and so maybe for this reason the audience liked it. Because especially in Italy there is a wave of populism, people who think that everyone has their own laws and, in some way, Rocco has this kind of soul. (...). Sometimes, the normal people or common people can be criminals. It is not important to be a Mafia boss or to be ugly, you can be ugly also because your beat your wife every day. So, for this reason you are guilty, and you have to be punished. That’s the message.”

He says that realism is part of the success formula and contrasts his product with the old-fashioned idealized portrayals of saints, teachers, priests, etc.

Writer Arlanch offers a general overview: “There are some civil themes about the role of women, or the problem of immigrants. The necessity to be tolerant, the importance of the inclusion with everyone. It is something that everyone agreed upon it. RAI, Mediaset and Sky.”

### **11.6.2. Distinctions along Subsamples**

Addressing socio-political and political topics (in fiction) is apparently constrained in the Italian TV landscape. The pay-TV suppliers in Italy, Netflix and Sky seem of all potential clients of TV writers the least prohibitive about the topics discussed in their originals. Neither organization is mentioned in terms of censorship of issues. However, the pay-TV companies have produced only a few domestic TV series. The PSB RAI, on the other hand, has a large output of homegrown audio-visual fiction. Andreatta points at the long time it takes to produce TV series. This means “having to imagine the future and tune into a constantly evolving reality.” The large time lapse impedes the treatment of emerging hot issues.

An additional constraining factor regarding critical content emerges. According to two respondents (Ramosino, Careddu) the RAI channels are (still) dominated by political and/or religious ideologies. The third remaining main player in the TV series production, the Mediaset group of ad-based channels, is controlled by Berlusconi,

which exercises influence on content as well. The respondents make out a set of priorities at Mediaset channels that diverge from the public service and pay-TV organizations with respect to the handling of (relevant) topics: less discussion, probing of difficult themes and controversy, more lightness, coherence and (Italian) community.

The PSB is at least on the surface most inclined to produce content that observers may regard as societally relevant. Andreatta professes that RAI is open to many genres of fiction “beyond the usual bounds of crime and drama”, and in all “genres we always talk about society, even in comedy.” Arlanch confirms and sees the chances of success (in terms of realizing pitched scripts) increasing at RAI,

“with a social issue, that is quite relevant at that moment, or at a certain moment. (...). The last three years many stories about tolerance with immigrants were produced. It was something that the head of TV drama thought was an important theme to discuss.”

In general, Arlanch sees not so much difference between the three main business models regarding the inclusion of relevant messages; it depends more on the personal visions of the (often changing) heads of fiction at the prospective broadcasters.

Regarding functions and roles in the production of TV series, as observed among the Swiss respondents, the emphasis on societally relevant topics is strongest at the PSB developer and head of drama (Andreatta). The writers are, obviously, to a much lesser extent designated spokespeople and do not have to pay lip service to any public service or societal relevance of their and others’ creations. Nevertheless, the writers also discuss societally relevant issues.

### 11.6.3. Overview

- Societally relevant content of TV series a relatively important and contentious subject
- Discussion of issues in creator’s own TV series
- Interpretation of societal relevance is broad
- Main segregators: ethnicity/nationality, gender roles, class to some extent included and debated
- Crime and violence. Mafia treatments regarded as over-exploited vs. dangerous subject
- Catering to (perceived) politics of broadcasters causes anticipatory obedience by creators → strong constraints of messages
- Human dilemmas and issues are obvious success factors
- Social and socio-political issues are success factor regarding greenlighting by broadcasters, but do not evoke audience success.
- Realism is audience success factor → novelty effect in domestic production

## 11.7. The Dutch and Belgian Creators

The three respondents from Belgium and one interviewee from The Netherlands were recruited directly. The Netherlands and Flanders (Flemish-Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) share not only the language; TV productions are exchanged and on occasion co-produced by organizations from the two countries. A commissioner (Hermans) and a content manager (Janssen) are employed by the Flemish PSB VRT, one Flemish producer (Van Passel) worked on a series originally commissioned by ad-based TV. The product was in the end picked up by the PSB VRT. The respondent has also worked for pay-TV. The Dutch producer/director (Grotenhuis) works on a TV series for the PSB NPO (BNNVARA) and has experience in ad-based TV as well.

The respondents had little trouble grasping societal relevance as a concept. In debates on media content and functions, the concept is deployed in varying shapes and forms in Belgium and The Netherlands. More than discussing actual concrete topics, the respondents emphasize the situation and decision-making processes in the TV landscape in the Low Countries.

### 11.7.1. Societal Relevance: Elements and Success

Respondents name a range of ‘societally relevant’ issues and themes. Some are rather vague like “ethical questions and dilemmas” (Hermans) and “things to put on society’s agenda” (Janssen). The PSB employees emphasize (in accordance with their organization’s mandate) the mediation of Flemish identity, which they define as very inclusive.

Hermans and Janssen regard reflecting an inclusive Flemish identity as a success factor:

“That’s really important for our viewers, that they can relate, that they can recognize the Flemish identity. But that can be in so many ways. The feeling that it is very normal that you have like all kind of ethnicities (...). That there is a French-speaking character in the series (...), because that is part of our everyday life. So, if you want to reflect everyday life and put your story in nowadays life, then you have to get all these things into your story. “

The respondents doubt the chances of success of TV series with a strong focus on Flemish identity in the international market.

The longstanding political discussions around the breaking-up of Belgium in independent nations along language barriers is no topic in Flemish serial fiction.

Other societally relevant topics in a TV series include “suicide (...), sexting, grooming, the use of violence, sexuality, the longing for intimacy,” according to Janssen. Hermans adds environmental current issues addressed in fiction. Dutch producer Grotenhuis mentions the precarious position and the glass ceiling for women, and in his procedural series financial, corporate and industrial fraud, and sexual harassment as relevant themes. The series (*Towers of Power*) bases on real-life

law firms. The Flemish producer Van Passel adds widespread psychological problems and the (dysfunctional and at times cruel) treatment as important topics for society.

Realism contributes only to success in the shape of “relatable credibility” caused by “uplifted reality,” says Grotenhuis. The other respondents see it furthering the involvement on part of viewers if well done.

The inclusion of societally relevant messages is perceived as potentially problematic. Janssen mentions one reason that follows commercial media logic. He feels one needs to be in line with the (perceived right-wing oriented) audience opinion on socio-political questions.

### **11.7.2. Distinctions along Subsamples**

Regarding the relation between business models and the inclusion of societally relevant content elements, Grotenhuis exemplifies the relation with the PSB channels in The Netherlands:

“It is true that especially VPRO and BNNVARA [both more progressive PSB channels] will somehow naturally connect to these stories we like to tell, which also incorporate social issues. (...). We believe that it is important to tell stories that talk about, or are related to, the society we live in. But we do also provide series and films to AVROTROS and EO [the liberal-conservative, and the evangelical PSB channel, respectively].”

The experiences with ad-based TV are less positive for Grotenhuis. His series about the fate of women was canceled. He professes:

“The public network is overseen by the government, they have (...) responsibility, so you need to say something about the world we live in and some of the issues we tell in our series and stories, have to have some relation to society. The commercial networks, they don’t ask for that, they just want something entertaining and they need to get the advertisers. The more they sell for less money, the better it is. When I produce something for commercial networks, they don’t give a shit about what you want to talk about, about life or society. Any statements you would make about the society we live in, you better leave out, because when it gets kind of difficult, then the audience walk away.”

It follows that for the interviewee, the inclusion of societal relevance is a success factor in terms of getting projects greenlit by a PSB channel, whilst it is perceived at commercial TV as not contributing to audience success, hence the reluctance toward debating social questions at ad-based channels. Hermans puts the PSB’s requirement to include societal relevance in TV series in perspective:

“It is not a dogma. But (...) we are really looking to put it in the drama series, but not in an explicit way. (...). It should feel like the natural story, and (...) it makes you think about stuff in society. It is not a condition.”

### 11.7.3. Overview

- Societally relevant content of importance to the respondents: mandate of PSBs
- In Netherlands ad-based TV strongly against treatment of problematic topics → not audience success factor → not success factor for creators
- Strong adaption to broadcasters, but also maintenance of original ideas and 'shopping' for greenlighting: relatively large number of potential broadcasters/financiers
- Dissemination and discussion of Flemish culture, and inclusive Flemish identity is a regional success factor



## 12. Ideal Types of Creators

As a preamble to the conclusion, ideal types of creators are formulated to provide additional insight into the data. The emerging ideal types combine the answers to the research questions and add complimentary information.

Scholars provide the basis for this part of the analysis. Tippelt (2010) elaborates on the methodological facets of the deployment of real and ideal types. Ideal types are construed by extrapolation of observed tendencies and exclusion of any relativizing information. Other scholars offer typologies for comparison. Burns' work from 1977 (McQuail, 2010, p. 295) provides this study with four types of communicators and Wyss and Keel (2010, pp. 362-365) list ten types of journalists (see 3.7) that can (also) be deployed to reflect on the types discerned in the data. Cantor (1971) discerns three types of film producers employed at a major US TV network (McQuail, 2010, p. 302). Von Rimscha and Siegert (2011) discern types of entertainment media workers (producers and commissioners) in five European countries. See chapter 3.8.

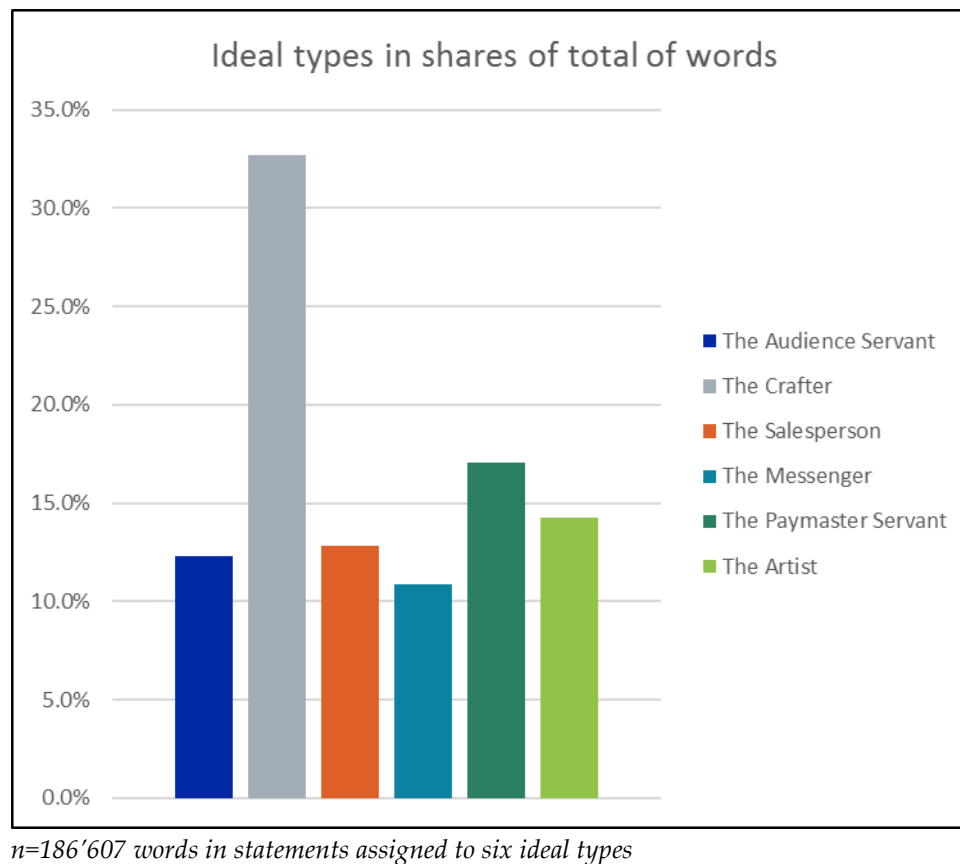
The ideal types deployed in this study base on extrapolation of the respondents' statements. The salient characteristics of the different ideal types come into being by extracting the statements that evidence the type. Any relativizing, moderating, contradicting and diluting counterarguments are excluded from the type. It follows that ideal types do not reflect any respondent per se. All interview partners exhibit a blend of the various types. Of interest is subsequently which ideal types are most prominent in the overall sample and in subsamples of countries, business models, and functions (writers, producers, commissioners/developers, experts). The salience of ideal types per subsample is discussed in chapter 13.

A fair share of the evidence presented in the subchapters on influences on content of TV series on the individual, routines and organization levels could also serve to demonstrate the features of the ideal types presented in this chapter. Evidence rendered in the chapter on societal relevance also substantiates the ideal type of the messenger and to some extent the other types. In addition, many statements assigned to the ideal types are also indicators of success factors of TV series. It follows that, in order to avoid redundancies in this chapter, only evidence is presented that has not been rendered in other chapters. To compare the prominence of ideal types, however, all the evidence is included.

In the following subchapters, the ideal types are presented. Each ideal type is elaborated upon along emergent categories of sub-topics. In this way, the divergent characters of the types are emphasized. The categories per ideal type are ordered according to prominence. The last two sections of the subchapters on the ideal type consist of the prominence of the ideal type and an overview in bullet points.

In Figure 18, the salience of ideal types is depicted in shares of the total number of words in all statements assigned to the six types. 'The Crafter' is the most salient type, followed by 'The Paymaster Servant,' 'The Artist,' 'The Salesperson,' 'The Audience Servant' and 'The Messenger.'

Figure 18. Prominence of ideal types in shares of total number of words



## 12.1. Ideal Type of “The Audience Servant”

All creators involved in the realization of TV series purportedly work for the audience. However, as the label indicates, serving the audience is the one and only task this ideal type of creator acknowledges. The subchapters of this chapter entail the topics that emerged in the statements assigned to the ideal type: the influence of the audience features; the audience sentiments as essential criterion; audience targeting; audience resonance, feedback, success; and the tasks of broadcasters.

### 12.1.1. Influence of Audience Features

The audience influences the content of series entirely. Janssen adapts the political tonality and messages very strongly to the (perceived) audience mood. Grotenhuis thinks that the essential feature of series is being credible and relatable to the audience and adapts the storytelling to the perceived attitudes of an audience. Audiences can manage their expectations if the genre of a series is consolidated. Ramosino describes the process from pure creation to audience constraints: “Later on in the development you are going into details, (...) see [whether] (...) you are not sharing [too little] with the audience so they might not understand.” According to Petronio, local dialects are a no-go, because the audience is “all Italians.” Grisoni deploys social realism to achieve the goal of engaging the viewers. Mayor distills

audience preferences from other content types like travel and nature documentaries and incorporates these into TV series. Innovation is all nice and well, but one always focuses on what one knows the audience likes, she states.

### **12.1.2. Audience as the Essential Criterion**

The audience sentiment is the one and only criterion whereby TV series are assessed. The core of the job is entertaining, but also involving, engaging, capturing and bonding with the audience(s) through a TV series with the right features for the viewers. For writer Petronio, the principal consideration is entertaining the audience: “I always think about not boring my audience.” The crucial writing task is selecting and processing stories in a way that meets the demands of the audience, according to Ramosino. Alber states that a TV series ought to create a universe where viewers know where they are, even if it is an unattractive fictional place. According to Arlanch, the mission of writers in times of many platforms and channels is to conceive of “a product that talks in different ways to different audiences. On more levels of interpretations.” Mayor advises creators that they do not write for friends or for themselves, but for their mother and grandmother; these are going to watch.

Arlanch finds it does not matter whether you narrate about “furies and dragons or about immigrants in a contemporary city, the important thing is to tell a universal story with deep themes” to make watching worthwhile for audiences with ample choice. Scherfig is convinced that capturing an audience is the key measure of quality. Kropf says, “the viewer has to grasp the emotions as realistic, as authentic, in Science Fiction as well as in drama (...) at the door step.” Fischer decides on budget questions in the production of series by pondering whether the audience will notice.

Broadcasters strongly deploy the audience satisfaction as an assessment criterion of products. Mayor prioritizes the audience resonance over ‘expert’ opinions: “A very popular show may be strongly criticized by the press and the professionals. On the other hand, when the pros like a show, very often the public doesn’t really like it or watch it with parsimony”. Lüthi sketches the uproar in the comments section of a negative review of *Der Bestatter*. Schweizer says that programming a series that draws a large audience is looking for a needle in a haystack: “There was never more talk about series and less watching of them” at the PSB. Lüthi identifies wholeheartedly with viewers when reading scripts: “it has to be entertaining and rousing.”

### **12.1.3. Audience Targeting**

Audience targeting is of essence to this type of creator. In-depth audience research is important. Sheer numbers and shares of demographic sections do not inform this ideal type. In German TV, as some creators grudgingly state, the “female between 30 and 45” (Terjung) was for a long time to be served. Currently, Kropf says, an increasing number of suppliers seek to serve varying specific audience sections. Gram says that Danish DR series are targeted to slightly varying demographics, but

“always stay within the middle ground.” The broadcaster reaches the targeted audience by providing quality and elements that fulfil demands. Widman explains:

“If you can tell a story that handles that subject [refugee crisis] in a dramatic way and in a way that people see things that they haven’t thought about earlier, that is good drama, good story telling. And good story telling leads to success (...). As a creator, you have to talk to an audience that you know.”

Smith says, “I put myself in an armchair, thinking, would I honestly sit through this? And when I wouldn’t, I have to go back and start again.” Alber sees the prime-time audience not digesting the “cynical” series *House of Cards* and preferring the “warm” *Borgen*. Schweizer insists that the broadcaster must fulfil the audience expectations pertaining to the program of a specific time slot. Fitze states that the audience of the mainstream PSB channel needs to be able to identify with a series from their life world: “Our series are then prissy, respectable, to serve a broad audience (...). People are interested when it concerns them; they recognize it. (...). We have to be dependable to the audience.” Arlanch exemplifies the correlation of ‘good’ content and large audiences and prefers broadcasters where he “has the opportunity to say something interesting to a lot of people.”

#### **12.1.4. Audience Resonance, Success, Feedback**

The qualitative audience resonance of the tailor-made product is the one indicator of success of a TV series to this ideal type.

Hermans and Janssen say: “We knew that in Holland the raising water and the water problems are really topical, but we didn’t suspect that the Flemish people would also be so concerned about it. So yes, it was a real success.” Gram says, “you need to have good numbers on Sunday night. The writers, as well as the head of drama and the broadcaster executives, look at elements of the show that might appeal to a wide audience.” Innovation is important for audience resonance, if viewers feel that they can relate to the genre, content and the characters in a new form (Grotenhuis). Kropf sees success arriving where viewers can recognize themselves in the dilemmas. According to Irlé, success in series can depend on managing to “let the viewer go where he is not allowed to go or what he doesn’t know.”

The nature of audience feedback is another essential element to this ideal type. Alber receives detailed feedback on certain elements (‘wrong’ sets, props, locations) and behaviors (‘bad’ smoking, drinking) portrayed in her series. She concludes that the audience is extremely attentive and engaged. Petronio infers that her series is a big success because people on the street tell her. Ramosino also regards the reactions of the audience to the plot resolution in her series as gratifying for a writer. Gylling describes a similar event: “This man lived with his wife in the suburbs with small white poodles. I have touched someone who was not like me. That’s the biggest success criterion for me.”

A lack of success is related to content not matching the audience of the broadcaster, channel, and/or time slot. Berggren found out that the “target audience

of TV3 didn't know what Cold War was at all. We tried (...) explaining the Cold War for the younger audience, but they didn't care." Beraud summarizes, "if the core audience doesn't like it, nobody likes it." Not meeting demands depresses chances and success is finite: "each series fills a need and you need to respect that need. And then, once this need is quenched, people go to another series," he adds. Mayor says:

"We have done something in La Chaux-de-Fonds with watches. The people said, it is marvelous, because we can see that the cop is fan of the local... In the cop's office, there was a little fan thing. So, they say, oh, we see that we're at home and he's truly in La Chaux-de-Fonds."

#### **12.1.5. Task of Broadcasters**

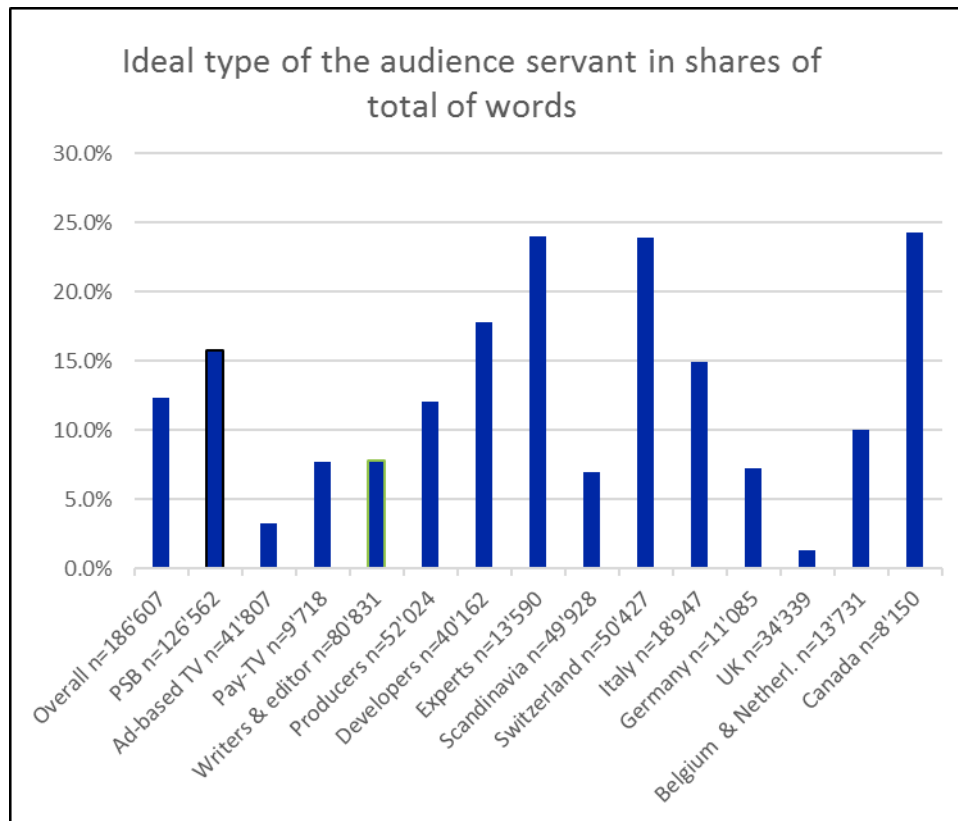
The sole purpose of broadcasters and the TV series industry is to serve the audience by enabling access to creators' work.

From a broadcaster's perspective, Beraud says on assessing pitches: "you ask them, whether this could appeal to this person, that person, this person." Fitze offers a criterion for acquisition of series: "We look how it performs in the USA; we look at the broadcaster, not so much at the numbers. (...). We look at our audience and we try to offer them what they think is high-quality."

#### **12.1.6. Prominence of "The Audience Servant"**

As Figure 19 shows, the audience servant is most prominent among the experts, the Swiss respondents and the single Canadian Beraud. It is least prominent in ad-based TV and among UK respondents.

Figure 19. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of 'The Audience Servant' in shares of total number of words



The audience servant n=23'008 words in statements assigned to the ideal type

### 12.1.7. Overview

- Serving audience is only task
- Strong connection between understanding of audience, manufacturing suitable content and audience success
- Success indicated by records of involvement of the audience, not merely numbers
- Audience largest influence on content of TV series
- Creator aims to fulfil audience demands with suitable content
- Catering to construct audience enables certain messages, constrains others
- Broadcaster and/or production team can be proxies for audience → large influence
- Societally relevant content elements like cultural proximity, local references, realism and authenticity integrated → contribute to success

Exemplary evidence is also rendered in subchapters 9.3.3.2, 9.4.6, 9.5.7, 9.6.6, 9.7.3, 10.3 and pertaining to societal relevance in chapter 11.

## 12.2. Ideal Type of “The Crafter”

The creation of ‘good’ TV series in a well-executed project is the core task of the ideal type of the crafter. Alber finds that producing TV series is a craft more than it is creating art or literature. The advantage is that a craft is learnable, she states. Beraud says, “I think you can bring in the expertise from a foreign country like the US to know how to do things” in Quebec. The Danish went to Hollywood to investigate the creation of TV series. Arlanch says, “I discovered how it worked in an international co-production. And I worked with USA screenwriters and USA directors. It has been very, very useful for me”. Van Passel says: “There are so many stories in the world, so many good story-tellers. (...). So, let's just start to dig as much as possible into our own stories and make these as good as possible.”

In this chapter, the attention goes out to facets of attitude and motivations of the ideal type, the perception of the task and of the content of TV series, the processes, and the perspective of the crafter on broadcasters, audiences and success.

### 12.2.1. Attitude, Motivation, Inspiration

The format TV series offers the crafter possibilities not available in other formats, Gabold explains:

“What people are doing now are television series. Because you have the possibility of multiple plots, (...) characters, which we love as storytellers! It has taken all over the book, the novel. Whereas a movie is 1.5 hours, maybe two hours long. Cinema as a media platform is also outdated.”

The sole motivation for the crafter is the product: intricate stories, plots, characters. Selection is important: “So there is a certain kind of story that I’m good at. And there are kinds that I’m not. (...). And that’s the reason I often give for turning down a job,” Gallagher states. Some respondents narrate plot-driven, others character-driven: “Quite all I think about is the people in the story and the story. I do my best to become the people in the story and to feel what they’re feeling” (Grisoni). Alber says that only well-developed and -developing characters can carry TV series. In addition, along the way a balance between recurring and new elements must be struck. Smith exemplifies the nature of the professional attitude and motivation of the ideal type further: watching drama on TV is

“not a relaxing thing for me, because you’re either watching it thinking, how on earth did that get commissioned? Or you see something that is so good, you just get depressed and cry and think, I’ll never be able to write anything as good as that. You never get into the middle and just relax.”

Gallagher confesses:

“I have one platonic ideal of a work in me, of a drama or a book and everything I do is a failed attempt to achieve it. (...). I began to

realize that I do have personal themes, it is just that I think of them as a limited bag of tricks.”

### 12.2.2. Content as Main Task

The crafter as writer or producer focuses on the essential task of creating scripts and series. To avoid being sidetracked, Widman says, “We focus on development. (...). So, we can be freer.” The crafter is very elaborate about the content and its form. Alber describes: “Tatort meets Six Feet Under. That is the realm. A conventional series because of the genre and the time slot, but with innovative elements, serial narration plus episodic resolution, grounded characters with sympathetic weaknesses.” Irlé says: “The look [is based on] research we’ve done with our director of photography. (...). We wanted to have the world of Station Horizon very warm and (...) the places that don’t really belong culturally to Station Horizon, colder.” Gallagher states that TV series are best inspired by other sources, not by TV fiction. Alber explains that the creative team had clear predeterminations that *Der Bestatter* should not evolve in the direction of comedy, despite having a comedy star as its main character. In addition, she strived for serial storytelling instead of episodic resolution.

In general, quality is a key criterion to the crafter. Smith says: “Everything has to be right, the performance, script, idea and (...) the timing. (...). If three work and one doesn’t, then you don’t have a success.” Alber sees her series having flaws, but the lack of depth of some characters was over time remedied. Wood says: “Nine times out of ten, series are not good because the script isn’t good.” Respondents regularly acknowledge room for improvement in their work and point out reasons for flaws. Research is one basis for achieving quality and respondents adhere to realism, as Ramosino says: “Reality can be much more interesting than your fantasy.” Arlanch invests large resources in research as well. Innovation is another basis of quality: “Certain story telling techniques will always work. If you combine them with surprising elements, then you can really rely on [at least a limited audience].” Arlanch thinks that the crime genre can only be innovated by introducing new types of characters, all else is exhausted.

The story itself organically leads the way for the crafter. The direction is only confined by the internal cohesion and meta-level communication considerations. Smith says: “The script you can’t write, the one that won’t work, it is where he [the very dark main character] lives in a world that is completely devoid of morals and gets away with everything, without any visible internal suffering.”

The ideal type might work within a certain genre but will never be confined by it. Gram exemplifies: a genre is “a contract that you make with the audience. But it is more important that a TV series stays true to its self.” Winger says: “We are not a hard spy thriller. We are a mix. It is closest to an adventure, and a coming of age story.”



### 12.2.3. Processes

Maximum influence on content is a goal of the crafter in the development and production processes. Evidence is also presented in the subchapter 9.7. Grisoni: “I think one of the reasons I found myself doing so much television (...) has been because I’m not expected to stop on delivering the scripts (...). I’m an important part of the production.”

The creative team is an important topic elaborated upon extensively by many creators: “We are three people who have been working from the first season. (...). We have a Danish man, Nicolai, and me; we worked at the three seasons. And then, for the second season, we made the story line together, but in the third season, we were two more people, so we were five in the story line group” (Ahlgren on *The Bridge*). Alber mentions days of brainstorming with the writers-team in the filming location of her series. The influence on content can be shared: consensus and motivation are central. Mosholt: “I don’t believe in the lonely artist in a process that is so collaborative.” Similar statements are rendered in subchapters 9.6 and 10.3.3. A key to successful teamwork is large amounts of trust and cohesion accumulated in previous collaborations in the ‘people business,’ many respondents indicate. Grisoni says: “It has to be done in the absolute best way. So people’s energies have to be orchestrated. And people have to feel that what they do matters.” Van Passel went out on a limb by deploying two directors and having each shoot, supervised by the head writer, half of the scenes of episodes of a previous series. Friction surfaced, “but it is a kind of conflict you really like because it is about people going as far as possible into ideas they want to establish.”

Well-functioning processes contribute as much to the job satisfaction of the crafter as a quality product. Development and production processes require accurate coordination. A negative example of the latter is to several (Swiss) respondents the flopped series *Tag und Nacht*. Planning also involves the division of the creative tasks essential to the crafter into e.g., head and episode writers. Respondents regularly describe the story as a constant work in progress. Ahlgren says: “We are always changing a lot in the story line because we think we have better ideas while writing.”

### 12.2.4. Role of Broadcasters

The crafter type often laments the selection by broadcasters, which bases on wrong validations of the quality of a script (Van Passel, Grotenhuis, Smith, and many others). The German respondents complain about the unquenchable thirst of broadcasters for crime stories and, correspondingly, the inflexibility of the audience. To the crafter as writer or producer, broadcasters ought to be nonobtrusive enablers of the dissemination of the product. Creative freedom is the key to good products. About *The Team*, Lüthi formulates the (partnering) broadcaster’s strategy that suits the type of the crafter best: “Not the [investor of] money decides, but the quality of ideas. There is no point influencing, because the Danish know the job. That began with Von Trier and they have been at it since, a process of decades.” Lüthi lauds the

processing of adaptation proposals by the creative team that weighs all ideas only on their merit.

Support by the broadcaster is welcomed to improve product quality and is not primarily of financial nature: the crafter takes pride in producing quality also at small budgets: “There’s very little budget on both *Maria Wern* and *Gåsmamman*. And we made very good TV series,” says Wännström. Alber, however, points to the impact a lack of resources (time) had on the quality of a past series.

The crafter as developer in the service of broadcasters also adheres strongly to (investment in) the quality of program, to innovation and to the belief that the subsequent edification of the audience will be achieved. Beraud and Schweizer focus strongly on unique qualities of series on offer for procurement. Gram says that DR never prolongs or repeats successful TV series. On the other hand, the crafter at a less renowned broadcaster finds that skills are developed through continuity of production of series, says Lüthi in reference to a long running series on Swiss TV. Dramaturgical knowledge bases on experience and is insufficient in Switzerland.

### **12.2.5. Perception of Audiences**

The crafter does not attach much weight to audience information or numbers. Even more so, trying to accommodate momentary audience preferences can lead to failure, as Kropf says. Feedback by consumers is welcome but essentially of little significance. Alber says: “you get as many opinions as viewers.” Audience considerations do not influence the product, but the crafter does perceive the processing capacities of (potential) viewers positively: “We don’t have to have these scenes (...), where you have to get the audience to understand. We try to have bigger faith in the audience. Eventually, they will understand.” From a broadcaster’s perspective, the program needs to have quality and, as Hermans says, must be up-to-date: “If we stay stuck in the genres, we had in the 80ies, 90ies and the 00ies, we will have a problem in 10 years. We have in a way to educate [the audience, to] make them familiar with new styles.” Unlike the type of the audience servant, who respects and caters to the current preferences of the (construct) audience, the crafter finds that the audience will (eventually) appreciate a high-quality TV series, as Andreatta indicates.

### **12.2.6. Success**

The crafter welcomes the strongly improved status of TV series as a relevant media product. Winger says he felt in the past like a baseball fan in a country of people crazy about football. The crafter measures success of a series by its perceived quality. Besides good scripts written by highly competent writers, Scherfig says: “What has been part of the Scandinavian success is that we make high-end drama. (...). We had strong photographers, strong directors and we have a (...) a high production value.” Grotenhuis feels that the content must prompt the standard of the production value. *The Office* needs less investment than his series about a top law firm (cars, costumes, settings).

Greenlighting of projects and audience success of the finished product depend on the multi-faceted quality of the series. Ahlgren says:

“The popularity of *The Bridge* is because we try to make stories in a different way. Sometimes we say, no, this story we have seen before in another series, we have to twist it, so we have a more edgy way to tell a story. And that’s because we want *The Bridge* to be something that we’re not used to.”

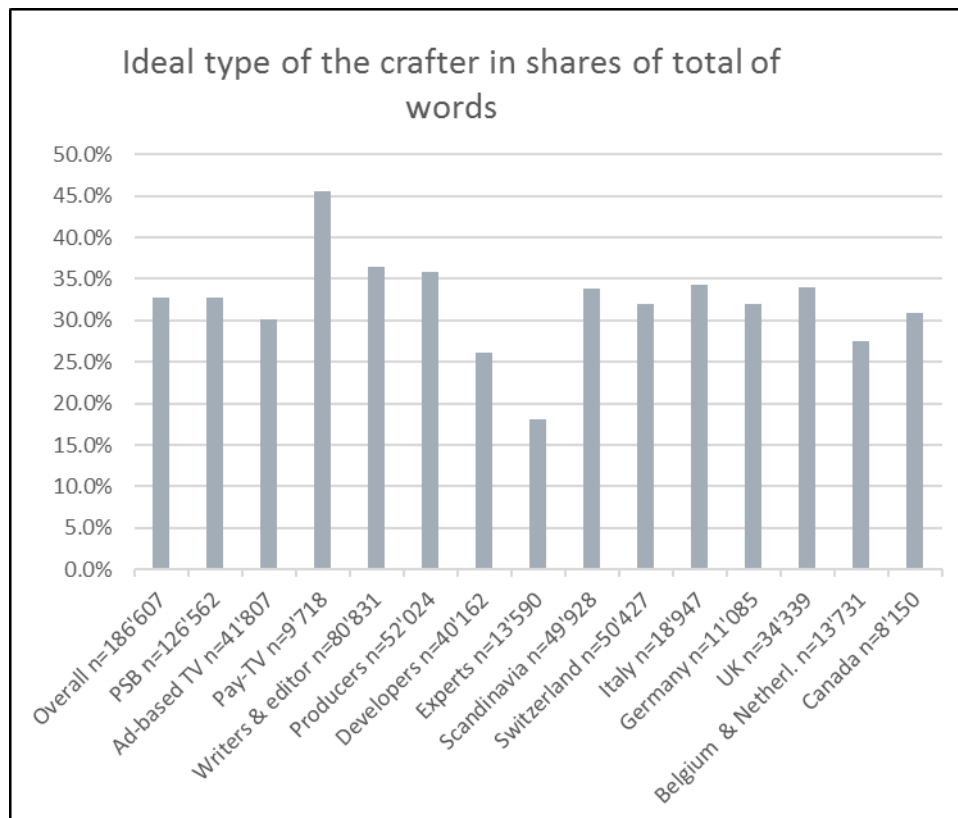
Lüthi explains that a star is not enough for success. The intricacies of the role must fit.

Audience success is nice to have, but the fundamental value of the series – as perceived by the crafter and respected peers – is the dominant criterion of success. Even a well-received series is not a real success to the crafter if she/he must acknowledge quality defects. Alber says: “I was very surprised by the success of the first season. I wasn’t satisfied at all.” Success is also achieved where a creator is allowed to tell a story to its logical conclusion, as Terjung says about his series *Edel und Starck* and *Danni Lowinski*.

### 12.2.7. Prominence of “The Crafter”

As Figure 20 shows, the crafter is most prominent at pay-TV, writers and producers. The type is salient throughout all subsamples. The experts are not directly creating TV series.

Figure 20. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of ‘The Crafter’ in shares of total number of words



### 12.2.8. Overview

- Main concerns of the crafter: content and process quality
- Most salient ideal type → demonstrates priorities of respondents in their work
- Similarities with the artist → gratification from production and product
- Crafter: not 'art' but quality outcome of good processes and competence
- Success: individual and team satisfaction, recognition of peers
- Broadcasters or audience: little resonance does not equal lack of success
- Influences on content admissible only from 'competent' creation team and engaged developers
- Societal relevance depends on story demands: focus on universal human issues
- Processes in team may lead to societally relevant messages

Exemplary evidence is rendered mainly in subchapters 9.6., 9.7., 10.3., and chapter 11.

## 12.3. Ideal Type of "The Salesperson"

The one and only target of the ideal type of the salesperson is tangible, numerical success of the TV series. To the salesperson, series are a sellable and expensive commodity, a consumer good, before they are art objects, handcraft products with intrinsic value, or vehicles for expression or relevant messages. The emerging topics are quantitative success, the ideal type as broadcaster, genre and ratings, budgets, marketing and stars.

### 12.3.1. Quantitative Success

Success is measured exclusively in total numbers of viewers and market shares. Fitze says about *Der Bestatter*: "48 percent market share and 757'000. We never have that anymore!" Widman declares about *Real Humans*, a critically acclaimed series that was remade internationally: "When it comes to counting heads, in Sweden, we could have a bigger audience." Arlanch also produces numbers to argue that "new type" series are successful: "The biggest success is still *Montalbano*. Last year it did 11 million and 44%. This was the greatest market share of all time for fiction. (...). The *Medici* who did almost 30%." Andreatta adds: "This year we have the best season in 10 years in fiction with an average of 22% and 5 million and a half." Gram talks about high success standards at DR: "We want the numbers like (...) a national football match or something. Those are the kind of numbers we go for." Scherfig measures the pan-Scandinavian success: "Season three had 3.5 Million viewers (...) together. So that it was really a strong impact and shows that TV series in the Nordic

countries get many viewers in the different countries.” Widman states about his series on pay-TV channel Cmore: “We even had more viewers than *Game of Thrones*, so we’re very proud.”

A respondent argues that content is determined by audience attraction: “RTL sets many series in Nordrhein-Westfalen because a large share of their audience lives there.” Lüthi sheds doubt on the relevance of prestigious series: “*Game of Thrones* or *Breaking Bad* have futile market shares compared to sitcoms like *The Big Bang Theory* (...). *Breaking Bad* and *True Detective* are brilliant, but if one deploys clear benchmarks... limited success!” Alber says that too much realism turns the series into a documentary, a format no one watches. Wood explains the core of her consulting: she is not “paid by them [series producers] to change the world. I am paid by them to tell them what would be successful, which is usually what is successful on TV now.” Obviously, ‘successful’ means high ratings.

Imitation is an attractive option for the ideal type of the salesperson. Grotenhuis explains how he copied a successful series of an ad-based network about rich wives in a nouveaux-riche community for a competitor. Remaking successful series is a good option as well, as Wännström did with *Gåsmamman*.

For the salesperson, the reason for a lack of viewers and market shares lies never with the content or features of the series. Terjung bemoans the programs surrounding his series that caused his audience to vanish. Winger describes disappointing ratings for his series *Deutschland 83* at RTL but thinks that many viewers went to Amazon to watch it. Typically, interviewees proof or refute the success of a discussed series with audience size arguments. Gabold thinks the time slot prevented (even) better ratings for *The Killing*. Kropf blames the mediocre ratings of his series on the difficult time slot.

The salesperson type is focused on remuneration. Gallagher explains the internal legitimization of writers:

“The way to do it is to look inside and do what (...) you see. Selfishly and inwardly and do what you want to do. And that’s the hardest thing, because you’ve got to feed your family at the end of the day. You do have to have a commercial streak in you.”

### **12.3.2. The Salesperson at Broadcasters**

The ideal type of the salesperson is present at broadcasters as well, as a ratings-inspired assessor or as a budget supervisor. Mayor sums up why ratings matter (to ad-based TV and PSB): “Market shares are used to sell publicity at time slots.” Hermans says that her boss, a former banker, wants to see a “return on investment” of the “expensive” in-house drama. Petronio states that Netflix is especially interested in viewers’ loyalty to the series: another audience size benchmark.

Terjung says that his series was cancelled after one episode for lack of market share: “It is a record, the shortest series ever.” The opposite is also stated: constant renewals of series like *Downton Abbey* (Deroche-Miles). Mayor indicates a lot of nervousness about whether the market shares of *Station Horizon* will stabilize, after

starting on a high note and descending into average ratings at the third episode. Beraud states that his PSB has a higher success rate (70%) than the US industry (17%) in greenlighting second seasons of in-house series, despite an abundance of funds in the US. Continuation of series depends only on ratings.

Creators evaluate the broadcasters in a way congruent with the ideal type. Ahlgren sees differences in budgets, but for the rest broadcasters are all the same to him as a writer. Wännström thinks her series fit any channel, but Cmore had good ratings. Widman also does not see brands of broadcasters as important for the success of series. The only distinction is size and demographics of broadcasters' audiences. Gallagher explains: "The creator (...) thinks (...) what is the best way to get my stuff to the biggest audience? And the biggest (...) and the most lucrative audience is (...) in the American [ad-based] networks." Mosholt talks about the attraction of Netflix: "The idea of the potential audience being so big from the beginning. That outweighs everything else."

The search for international sales is always on for the salesperson. A selective approach to channels, time slots, audience features or charges for viewing is inexistent at the type. Deroche-Miles advises: "Once you have a first season which is successful, (...) sell the format." Ramosino says about *The Medici*: "It was successful in terms of audience, but the most important thing is that it was sold all around the world." Scherfig is jubilant about *The Bridge*: "It is going to be shown from the 4th of January in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, simultaneously every Sunday." An American version of the series was made, *The Tunnel* tells the same story, and Scherfig mentions a Russian version. Equally euphoric is Winger about the international sales of *Deutschland 83*. Platform sales matter as well, as Winger demonstrates: "We are on Amazon, in the US on Hulu, very successful too. In Germany, of course, on iTunes, in the US as well, simultaneously available with the broadcasting." Fitze thinks that *Der Bestatter* by now has enough episodes and is successfully marketed internationally. In addition, crime novels are an option that was considered to generate more revenues. Østerbye mentions the remake of *Rita* in The Netherlands as a measure of success.

### 12.3.3. Genre and Ratings

The salesperson honors the rules of the genres with traditionally large market shares. Ramosino explains: "I think being in a genre is helpful because it helps you to find an audience." Crime stories are by many interviewees regarded as a highly sellable genre. Van Passel says:

"I think that innovation is necessary for the market and we have to embrace everybody who works in innovation. But I'm not sure it is necessary for success, maybe on the contrary. I think that the old classical genres are still very successful."

Gallagher explains why series are to be preferred over serials from a commercial perspective:

"One of the things that the creators are looking for, (...) is to last beyond that first season. (...). In the network arena, traditionally, they would look

for a show that would run for a hundred episodes. The ‘precinct’ [series is set in] the work place of a set number of characters and they deal with a new story every single week. (...). The long running series is stripped of all the things it doesn’t need. So all the characters are reduced to a few very broad strokes. And change very little. The stories are start and stop, simplified to a degree where they don’t hugely impact on the characters.” Hermans confirms that serials are potentially averse to large market shares.

#### **12.3.4. Budgetary Considerations**

Budgetary considerations can fit the ideal type of the salesperson from a broadcaster’s, as well as from a creator’s perspective. Beraud as financier elaborates on negotiations:

“Sometimes you have people saying, (...) I need 500’000 dollars per episode for this. Ok, why? Well, because all half hours are done at 500’000 dollars an episode, (...) they’re all like this. And [I say], yeah, but your series is about two people talking around the table.”

He also thinks that budget size is not success-related. Grotenhuis sketches the struggle to realize products that are competitive but are endowed with a fraction of the budget of the international rivals.

A broadcasters’ dream creator is Berggren: “One hour of entertainment in Norway (...) costs 1.5 million. (...). Why can’t we do drama for that price? (...). Let’s blend the production method from reality TV (...) with drama.” He elaborates:

“We will never have more than two people talking in a scene. (...). We are educating the writers to write cost-efficiently. (...). In the script is always decided how many shots we need. (...). We are very much looking at (...) the production plan when we are story lining. (...). We don’t write any props (...) because we can use what is on the set when we arrive. And actors love to improvise.”

#### **12.3.5. Marketing, Stars**

Marketing and stars are important to draw in the large audiences. As Careddu says,

“If you have a good actor, an actor that the audience in some ways knows, it is better because (...) then you start with a good audience share. Because you do advertising and you push the product [with] the main character.”

Kropf adds that broadcasters know exactly which actors have had high ratings in the recent past and want them included. Creators even develop series tailor-made for the audience magnets. Ramosino sees the effect of the inclusion of stars firstly at pitching the series and then at the market shares:

“You can attach an actor per project, and it becomes easier to develop and to sell it. Even if it is at the initial level of development. (...). For Medici, when we managed to have Dustin Hoffmann, it made everything so much easier (...). It was fantastic in the show [and] in terms of marketing.”

Gabold confirms this. Irlé says about a famous French actor in his series: “it is important for our market to have someone they like, and they know.” Berggren says: “When we are casting, we are always looking for (...) who’s good in the press, who’s the it-girl? Who will do well in social media?” Fischer extrapolates: “We could film the telephone book with this star, the audience would still be there.” He sees hardly any stars in Switzerland that would draw the required 800’000 viewers.

Marketing is important to the salesperson. Grisoni observes, pertaining to niche series that unexpectedly break out to a larger audience: “I don’t think it is sudden. I think these things are planned. That has a lot to do with marketing.” There cannot be enough: “You have concepts about how something is being marketed. Are you ever completely satisfied? No. Do you want them to put more resources in the selling of the things you work on? Yes, please!” Wännström is satisfied:

“Cmore had billboards in the city, in the subways and they have trailers on their channel, on their sister channel and then they had it on different platforms in newspapers and on their websites. (...). They have it on Facebook and on Instagram. (...). And then they have the actors on the morning shows.”

Marketing is related to ratings, and thus to continuation of a series, Irlé stipulates.

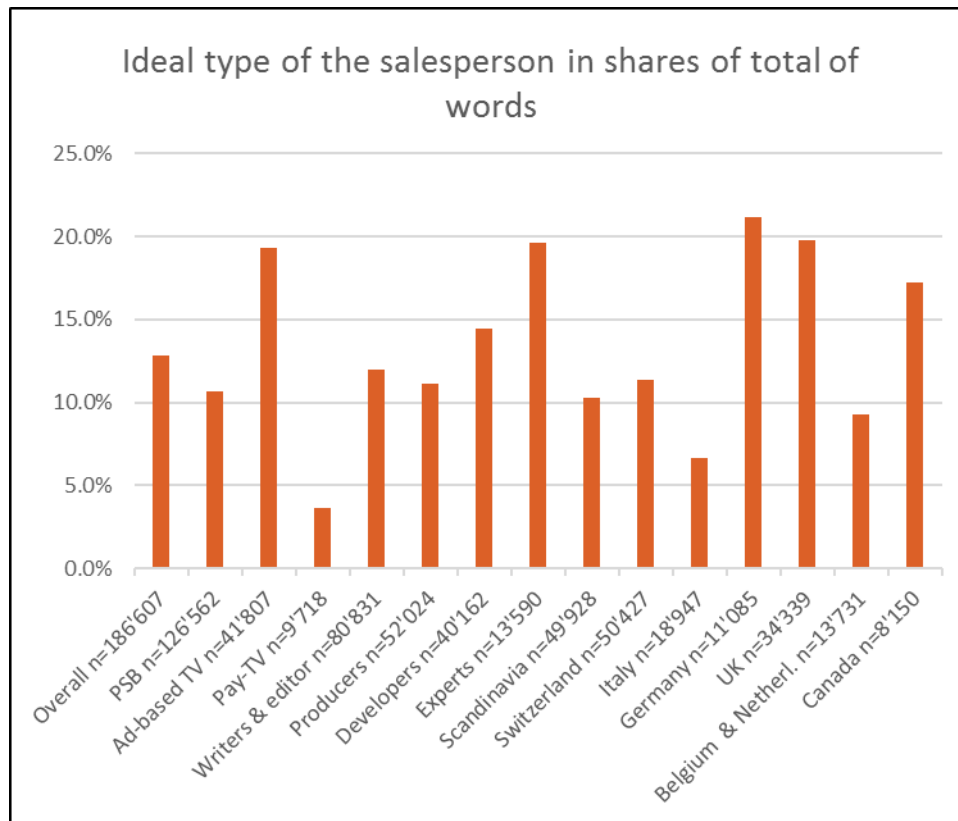
Reviews are of little importance, some respondents (Mayor, Lüthi) say: the mass audience diverges often from the critics’ opinion.

### **12.3.6. Prominence of “The Salesperson”**

The salesperson is most prominent among the German and UK respondents, among the experts, and among the respondents supplying ad-based TV. The type is least prominent among pay-TV and Italian respondents, as Figure 21 shows.



Figure 21. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of 'The Salesperson' in shares of total number of words



The salesperson n=23'930 words in statements assigned to the ideal type

### 12.3.7. Overview

- Only target of the salesperson is tangible, numerical success
- Success: high numbers of viewers, ratings, market shares
- TV series are expensive consumer goods, strong focus on highest ratings for lowest costs
- Any element that attracts viewers is the relevant quality in product
- Preferred broadcasters are those with largest potential audience
- Remuneration important
- Extensive compromise if the audience is enlarged
- Content and features only relevant for drawing viewers for broadcasters and advertising revenues
- Enabling of unobtrusive messages, constraining of elements that might limit audience appeal
- Averse to societally relevant and/or controversial content

Exemplary evidence is also rendered in subchapters 9.5. to 9.7., 10.3. and 10.4.

## 12.4. Ideal Type of “The Messenger”

The ideal type of “The Messenger” is uniquely focused on delivering important messages and uses entertainment as a vehicle for the elements he/she wants to communicate. Creators of the ideal type are idealists more than entertainers, audience pleasers or paymaster pacifiers. The emerging topics are presented in subchapters: the nature and importance of messages and success to the messenger.

### 12.4.1. Nature of Messages

Widman puts the essence of the messenger ideal type in a nutshell: “As long as there has been humans on the earth, good story tellers [have been] sitting around the fire and people have been listening to them [explain] different things in their world.” Gabold refers to De Saussure to stress the importance of what is communicated:

“What is signified, God dammit, when you have been sitting there for ten hours watching a television series: what is signified? And the signified (...) is what I call the other, the overriding plot. Every story told must have truth.”

Smith adds that series must communicate “some kind of truth about us and ourselves, our relationships and our relationships with the world around.” Ramosino believes that different writers on one TV series can present their opinions through the various characters. The condition is, however, that the writers have a deep sense of the ideas and their inclusion is not induced by outside pressure. The audience can then make up its own mind. “I think that stories are our tool to create a connection [between] people,” she adds. Once more, the double or second story of the Danish PSB DR is mentioned by Gram:

“Underneath lies a story about society or a story that has (...) social and ethical connotations. (...). The woman in a marriage, if it is a man and a woman, has just as big an interest in having a career as the man. In *Borgen*, we made that very clear by giving her the most important job in Denmark. By that we were able to speak about something that goes on in a lot of families in Denmark, in Europe and in the rest of the world.”

Alber finds that although escapism is the larger success factor, it pays off – for her personally – to present more challenging, deeper and potentially painful subjects to an audience. She sees her series changing the tonality and increasing in intensity in later seasons by portraying the traumata of main characters. Also, Beraud mentions universal human topics as the centerpiece of communication by TV series. Andreatta says: “some series (...) were stories in which you are going deep also into problems or in difficult subjects.”

A range of relevant themes are pinpointed in statements evidencing the ideal type of the messenger. Gram says about *Borgen*:

“We wanted people to believe that almost all our politicians are idealists. (...). In the papers and in (...) fiction the politicians are the bad guys and that plays into a world view that I really hate, because I’m a democrat in my soul and I want to believe in democracy and it is extremely hard at the

moment, but I still want to. (...). That was very much the belief of all of us, the three main writers."

Andreatta describes a series that used mermaids to discuss diversity: realism is not necessary for communication of important social comments. "Even lighter stories can be tied to subjects that matter," she says. Gallagher mentions his treatment of the character of 'Friday' in his TV series *Crusoe*: "How do we find justifiable equivalence to the racial issues in the book? How can I give a black actor lines that (...) I can be proud of giving to him and he can be proud of speaking?" Terjung wants to present topics like violence against women, and the relation of Muslims and terrorism but resents the oversimplification demanded by broadcasters. Careddu wants to tackle many topics:

"In Italy we have the habit to think that in some way we have to teach people to do well. But this is not the role of TV. [That is for] the school or the father (...), or the priest! (...). We have exported only Mafia stuff (...). The old boss with the ring, smoking a cigar, it is enough! There are many other people in Italy besides the Mafia boss."

To Berggren the cold war background of his series is essential: "It is still going on, the Russians are right across the border." Deroche-Miles sees significance in the current salience of the corrupt female police officer in British series, a double-headed taboo break.

Smith sees the potential and topical relevance of dark, flawed characters but thinks the mediation of ideas can only work if the story makes the character pay for the wrongdoings: "Whatever happens to the characters must be shown within a moral context." Grisoni names the essentials of storytelling: "A story and a character. That's why we watch. (...). Then, (...) if you are outraged about the politics of your local area (...), that will automatically become part of your drama." On his ambition: "I want serious drama where people with difficult problems, difficult decisions to make" are portrayed.

In addition to influencing society, the key messages in TV series are to the messenger indicators of (changes in) the society, which increases the relevance of the communication further: "Comedy is all about (...) human fallibility and embarrassment and awkwardness. And that is always changing. Our social attitude is always changing. And comedy is an incredible recorder of social attitudes" (Smith). In *The Rain*, Mosholt shows the survival of the group (as opposed to the individual), a reflection of a more "socialist" approach that is supposedly rooted in the Danish culture.

Wännström adapted the Dutch original in the series *Gåsmamman*:

"not that the Dutch aren't [emancipated], but in Sweden gender is very important (...). Most women work and are supporting themselves in a relationship, so it is very equal between men and women. So, we wanted to make Sonia even stronger as a woman, which is very important for the series."

Gram reasons similarly: "With all equality between the sexes in Scandinavia, women can be without morals too. It is not just something that men do when they are bad."

Ahlgren and Gabold emphasize the topicality of the way women are portrayed as equal to men in their series as well. Gabold mentions that the portrayal of the Swedish detective in *The Bridge* was provocative and purposely tapped into Danish clichés about Swedish feminists. Fitze mentions several issues relevant in Switzerland that are tackled in his series. Terjung decided to have his female lawyer work in a one-man firm in a shopping mall, because a freshly graduated working-class female lawyer would in reality not be hired by any high-ranking law firm.

From a broadcaster's perspective, Fitze emphasizes nation-wide relevance and would like to see acclaimed (and critical) Swiss novelists to write for future TV series of his PSB. At the time of the interview, the PSB selects projects for a new series. The central themes of prospective new series are banking, politics and the sell-out of mountain villages, to Fitze all very topical issues in Switzerland. In the current series of the PSB, the problems surrounding care for the elderly is addressed.

The ideal type of the messenger adheres mostly, but not always, to realism. Gabold ridicules the series *Versailles* where American screenwriters and English-speaking actors assemble an irrelevant portrayal of the court of the French king Louis XIV. In his series, as many languages as necessary are spoken to paint a realistic picture. Ahlgren goes as far as distinguishing the behavior of Swedish from Danish bosses: the first can show insecurity, the latter would never, and fiction needs to respect these differences. Mayor mentions the realism of a series about garbage men under new public management. The result of audience research on the series was not positive but the broadcaster persevered. Ramosino describes the efforts (research, hiring consultants) to create a realistic series about the finance industry set in London. The hardest part was finding means to make the protagonists in some form even slightly sympathetic. A similar difficulty is posed by the realistic and balanced portrayal of Mafia type gangsters. Petronio says: "The story begins with the real lives of the people. So, it is important that you have a connection with (...) real politics in Italy." Beraud on the other hand can do without realism in communicating important notions:

"Battlestar Galactica [a science fiction series] touches a nerve, (...) because it was about a colony looking for sanctuary. So, we can extrapolate the exodus, we can extrapolate the migrants, we can extrapolate what would we do in that situation."

#### **12.4.2. Importance of Messages**

The interviewees elaborate on the communicative importance of messages. Terjung believes in challenging the viewers: "It is not so bad when they get aggravated about their program (...). Even if people say what they want that doesn't mean you also have to give it to them."

The decision-makers at broadcasters are not granted influence on the work of the messenger.

"We wanted the Danish viewers to be so engaged with all the exciting stuff that happens in Borgen, the center of power in Denmark. (...). So, for

me, and the rest of the [writers'] room, it was definitely about telling the story we wanted, and not just pleasing the very nervous bosses."

Gram thinks the messages in *Borgen* align with mainstream convictions in Denmark and Scandinavia but not in other countries. He would not adapt them.

Creators discuss the significance of the portrayal of graphic violence, sex and debauchery. Some profess that messages that venture far beyond moralistic edification are of importance. Grisoni points at the gravity of depictions in, e.g., *The Sopranos*: the main character Tony

"takes his daughter to see the college, to make sure that it is the right place for her. He drives her there, he looks after her, he talks to her about it. And then in between he goes and meets that guy [a 'traitor'] and he beats him so brutally, and it is such a graphic bashing and he kills him. And then he meets his daughter again, straight afterwards. (...). No one had seen that kind of thing. (...). It is a very, very serious (...) analysis."

Deroche-Miles adds, about the amorality in high-end series: "It galvanizes imagination in a way. (...). It is very often nasty, it is (...) an esthetic code (...), a new way of creating emotions."

### 12.4.3. The Messenger and Success

Success is to some extent related to the traditional benchmarks such as ratings, sales and continuation of series. However, success is foremost about leaving a mark in society, or at least among the niche audience. Winger states that the extremely relevant and thoroughly elaborated messages in *The Wire* have influenced important opinion leaders in the US. Beraud reasons in the same vein about *Breaking Bad*. Terjung sees the diverging perspectives on social relations successfully communicated in *Danni Lowinski*. To Winger, the integration of relevant messages is an alternative way of emotionalizing because of the direct connection to the life world of people, also when this is done retrospectively as in his series about the nuclear threat in the 80s. Grisoni explains:

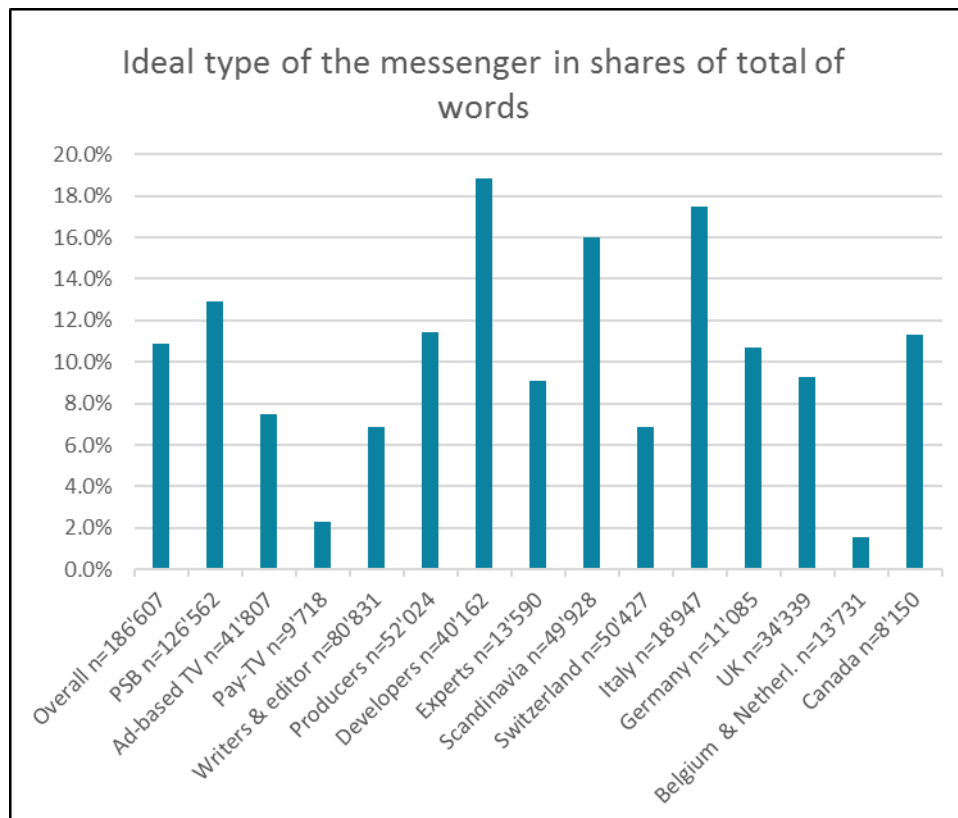
"Breaking Bad (...) caught a very big audience. They've also included people who had stopped watching drama because they felt it wasn't challenging enough. (...). [At dinner parties] the one drug you didn't make jokes about was crystal meth. People were scared of it. (...). Because it turned you into a monster and they [crystal meth consumers] were living on the estate behind your nice houses and they were going to go crazy and come and steal everything. Can you believe, then, that the next week, there was the show which (...) feuilleton tends to refer to as family entertainment, really. And its premises are: a teacher who starts making crystal meth. The way they film it, and the whole tenor of the drama, make it a very attractive proposition. And this teacher then has a smart, young friend who is a bit hip. You know, this becomes popular entertainment based around that drug. That's weird, isn't it?"

Fitze thinks it can pay off to swim against the stream and communicate unexpected elements.

#### 12.4.4. Prominence of “The Messenger”

The messenger is most prominent among the developers, the Italian and Scandinavian respondents. The type is least salient in pay-TV and among the respondents from Belgium and Holland (see Figure 22).

Figure 22. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of ‘The Messenger’ in shares of total number of words



The messenger n=20'285 words in statements assigned to the ideal type

#### 12.4.5. Overview

- Mission of the messenger is mediation of subjective societal relevance
- TV series are vehicle for messages, entertainment to lure audience, merely means to an end
- Goal of mediation: influence public arena and then evoke tangible change
- Similarities with propaganda, but of personal-subjective nature, not of pseudo-objective system-supporting nature
- Success: impact as intended on audience, society, public debate, influence on, and feedback from, opinion leaders and decision-makers

- Influence of stakeholders on content is tolerable to enable successful mediation
- No compromise on messages, not even to reach larger audiences
- Enabling of intended partisan messages, constraining of incongruent ones
- Broadcasters and TV series industry only relevant as disseminators and then amplifiers of messages

Exemplary evidence also rendered in subchapters 9.5. to 9.7., 10.3., and chapter 11.

## 12.5. Ideal Type of “The Paymaster Servant”

The ideal type of the paymaster servant is entirely focused on the organization that commissions, finances and broadcasts the product. The goals of the broadcaster overlap completely with the creator’s targets. The emerging topics are the perception of broadcasters, the matching of content to, and control by, broadcasters, greenlighting, and the measurement of success.

### 12.5.1. Perceived Character of Broadcasters

Creators of the ideal type of the paymaster servant base themselves fully on the perceived character and procedures of the paying client. Gallagher describes US broadcasters:

“Broadcasters (...) have a view of their own particular character that may or may not be true. (...). ABC sees itself as the family channel. (...). Fox is a male (...) channel, very much adventure, (...) superhero stuff, (...) science fiction, (...). FX, they have a particular idea of what constitutes an effect show. TNT regard themselves as kind of high-end drama. Sundance channel (...) see themselves as kind of very, very high-end. (...). You will refine your pitch depending on which channel you’re going to pitch to.”

He shapes his material for the broadcaster in the very early stages and continues to do so during the realization of the series. In buying series, Arlanch distinguishes along audience size and business models.

Ratings should not matter at PSBs, says Terjung, but the problem is that a developer gets into trouble (“gets cursed at”) if the viewing of a product is below expectations. Hence the pressure on creators to comply. Alber is employed by the German-Swiss PSB but acknowledges the pressure stemming from expectations of high ratings for the series.

The ideal type processes the different procedures that broadcasters adhere to in selection and realization of TV series. Mosholt states: “Because no matter which provider of content or broadcaster (...), they always work in specific ways.” Gram emphasizes the creative freedom stemming from permissive tolerance on the part of DR, whilst indicating that compliance to demands of broadcasters is a given.

“My main worry [at other broadcasters than DR] would be that they have a lot of executives (...) taking a lot of decisions based on fear, that always make it really hard and [it] also makes [for] bad shows.” Terjung details the decision-making at PSBs on which he depends:

“At ARD there are too many institutions who want to have influence, many departments need to coordinate. It is much more political and takes much longer. But they don’t do market research of a pilot, they order the set number of episodes.”

Kropf corroborates this evaluation. A Scandinavian writer would comply, but “no one really knows what TV 2 wants. That’s why (...) they are very hard to work for. (...). Their strategy changes a lot.”

Janssen explains why the paymaster servant’s compliance still results in a (relatively) diverse output of series: the demands of the (in this case PSB) paymaster diverge:

“On the one hand, it is nice that we can do a lot of genres that maybe a commercial station will not tackle (...). But on the other hand, as a public broadcaster, you’re only relevant if you have a broad audience, a wide range of people.”

Mayor reasons in the same vein and contrast the task to innovate whilst keeping the audience on board.

### **12.5.2. Match of Content to Broadcasters**

The ideal type of the paymaster servant emerges prominently where the broadcaster instigates the development of a series. Petronio describes how Netflix saw the possibility of turning their feature film *Suburra* into a series. The same production company was engaged that subsequently hired her. Thus, the essential concept and main story arch of the series was to an extent established before Petronio began. Several interviewees (Arlanch, Careddu, Ramosino, Østerbye, Grisoni) describe series made to order whereby an elaborate template is provided beforehand by the broadcaster or an affiliated producer.

If the creators instigate TV series, the ideal type of the paymaster servant knows very well what type of content suits a broadcaster. Careddu says: “There is the right connection between the show and the broadcaster;” the show shouldn’t be anywhere else. Terjung thinks his series would match ARD and ZDF (PSBs) better than the actual broadcaster, an ad-based channel. Lüthi says that the original author of the series made a leisurely and a high-speed version of the written pitch. He assumes he offered it to German PSB and the ad-based channel, respectively.

The knowledge about the broadcaster leads to the composition of ‘matching’ content from the early stages of development to the adaptations of content in final phases of marketing the product. Berggren puts the anticipatory obedience in a nutshell:

“We are quite good at knowing what the target audiences for the channel is. (...). And we are quite good at trying to reflect the channel. That’s



maybe why they don't interfere with us so much because we are very aware of the need of the channel to attract their core audience."

Østerbye made thorough changes to her original scripts for a US ad-based network. Terjung places himself in the shoes of the broadcaster in meetings: "You have to follow their logic." Arlanch summarizes the process and complies without objections: "When someone pays you to write something (...) you have to consider what his tastes and what his views of the world are. (...). Because they pay you. But it is something you can deal with." Irlé says about producing a series for the French-language Swiss PSB: "Of course I accept the challenge to write, direct and produce a mainstream content." He refers to many content adaptations regarding intricacies of the story, cast, tempo, settings, etc.: "The thing is: it is not in my power to redefine the audience of the prime time." Van Passel describes an instance of mis-matching: "Every TV station has its own DNA and I think that the show we made was absolutely too far from the DNA of the broadcaster. Which means that at a certain moment there is nothing more you can do, and you air it and you feel that (...) it is not the show they wanted to have."

Lüthi predicts from the broadcaster's point of view that the successor series to *Der Bestatter* will be a crime story; it is "a safe investment." Ahlgren refrains from writing TV series about politics: "It is difficult for broadcasters."

Grotenhuis sketches a large extent of adaption to the broadcaster if the organization is already on board at the development stage of a series. Mosholt believes it is fully justified that the financier is the authority and says: "If you in the end want something completely different than the ones who are paying for the show, perhaps you didn't talk enough about it in the beginning of the process."

### 12.5.3. Control by Broadcasters

The broadcasters formulate requirements the paymaster servant type then fully complies with. Petronio says Netflix did not tell her what to do: "They suggest [how] to tell the story. (...). How to keep the attention of the audience high." She followed up on the 'advice' with cliffhangers, etc. A Scandinavian writer sketches how budgetary management by the ad-based broadcaster translates into influences on content. According to Berggren the involvement goes beyond practicalities: "They are quite [engaged] in the process when it comes to the values in the story, how [it] reflects the core values on the channel, they are very concerned." Scandinavian interviewees comply with the demands of the PSBs to have a second main plot about societal issues. Ahlgren says that not all plots have to be realistic for the PSBs.

The developers in the service of the paymaster do not acknowledge any undue compromise on part of the creators commissioned by them: "There's a lot of trust between the net manager or the channel manager and the people who make the show (...). They actually work quite autonomously," says Janssen. However, the creators of *Thuis* "know by now what are difficult topics and they discuss (...) with their content manager, [whether] they can proceed with certain topics or not." The

frequency of content manager visits to the work floor of the series has increased, says Janssen. Beraud sketches the multi-layered “quality control.”

Gallagher advocates compromising in order to be able to work for powerful broadcasters with large audiences and extensive marketing machines. Østerbye states that streaming services allow the creators more leverage over content. Ahlgren prepares well before presenting the scripts to broadcasters, lubricates the working relationship, but still anxiously awaits their verdict. Mosholt was not weighed down by the (apparently quite comprehensive) supervision by his client Netflix; no negative verdicts were uttered by the company.

Co-productions complicate matters for this ideal type of creators: which of the multiple paymasters should one obey? Ramosino, Fitze, and others sketch difficulties because of contradicting demands.

Budgets are another domain where the ideal type conforms. Berggren rationalizes his compliance and interpreted the minimal budget as a challenge. He says the content suffered to an extent from the limited time available to write and film. The channel was satisfied and ordered another series. Ramosino explains in detail:

“When you do television, you are controlled by someone. (...). It is a fact that you have to respond to (...) economic control, because you can’t spend too much money, you have to make sure that you finish your job on time, you deliver your script on time and it should be handed in at the right moment.”

#### **12.5.4. Greenlighting by Broadcasters**

The ideal type of the paymaster servant also emerges strongly in the process of greenlighting. Van Passel explains: “The target public you should be able to interest is the people (...) [commissioning] the show.” Berggren agrees. Mosholt pinpoints financial attraction of proposals and was very pleased to produce for Netflix for a “normal Danish budget.” Arlanch recommends being very aware of what issues are currently in vogue at the broadcasters: “Many stories about tolerance with the immigrants were produced. (...). The head of TV drama thought it was an important theme.”

Grotenhuis thinks that personal relations to decision-makers are at least as important as the character of a broadcaster one writes for and pitches to. Widman emphasizes this point as well. Østerbye adds: “It comes back [to] whether the people who are working for these broadcasters are good at what they do.” Careddu and Lüthi direct attention to the competence of decision-makers at broadcasters as well.

Grotenhuis sketches the importance of knowing how the organization greenlights projects: “I think I wouldn’t go to Netflix Holland again, but I would fly directly to L.A. and pitch it there.” He understands fully that Netflix produces original content in large markets, but not in The Netherlands. The industry expert Wood states that the broadcaster needs to be convinced that the people in charge of the series “keep the machine on the road” after the go-ahead: the creators will stay

within budget and deliver on time. Gallagher confirms this but adds that the creators need to show exuberant passion for the project.

#### **12.5.5. Success to Broadcasters**

To the ideal type of the paymaster servant, success can only be the broadcaster's success. Grotenhuis exemplifies, "we developed 'Bittersweet', (...) it was a huge success. It doubled the number of subscribers to Linda TV [the channel] in 5 months' time." Careddu interprets success of his series in terms of benefits for the channel: "Rocco has been the very important start of a new RAI 2. Rocco is very good because it opens the audience of RAI."

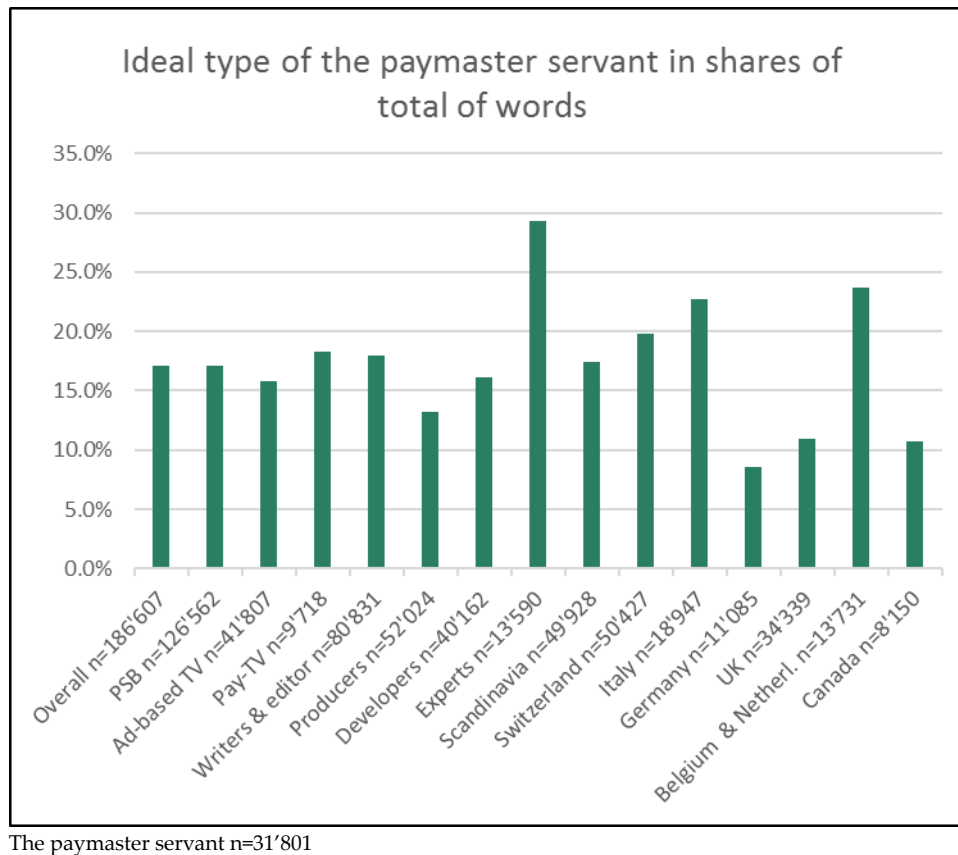
Success is internally assessed by the broadcaster and can have different forms. Beraud explains one form of success: "It was not that successful with the audience, but it was successful enough that it came in a different category we needed (...). And you do need those calling cards when you're a network."

The goal of this ideal type is matching the content to the financing broadcaster. This implies that, if the ratings are judged as insufficient by the client, the creator blames the broadcaster for it. Grotenhuis states that too little promotion for his series was made on the ad-based channel. Irlé would rather see his series broadcasted on Sunday. It would have better ratings.

#### **12.5.6. Prominence of "The Paymaster Servant"**

As Figure 23 depicts, the paymaster servant is most prominent among the expert respondents, as well as among the Italian, Belgian and Dutch respondents. The type has a substantial presence in most subsamples, somewhat less at the German, UK and Canadian interviewees.

Figure 23. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of 'The Paymaster Servant' in shares of total number of words



## 12.5.7. Overview

- Singular focus on broadcaster, complete identification with values and goals
- Ideal type informed about character, decision-making at the broadcaster, prevents conflicts
- Adaptation to mandate and requirements of organization
- Broadcaster is complete proxy for audience
- Requirements of construct audience as interpreted by broadcaster accepted and executed
- Organization with largest influence on content
- Success to creator: realization of TV series, paymaster's goals are achieved
- Broadcaster can measure success by ratings, profit, 'calling card' or program fit
- Enabling of societally relevant elements required by broadcaster, if deemed suitable for construct audience
- specific societally relevant content included on demand: gender roles, history, community values, realism, but also human issues, escapism and fantasy

Exemplary evidence is also rendered mainly in subchapters 9.5, some in 9.6 and 9.7, 10.3 and chapter 11 on societal relevance as required by (in particular) PSBs.

## 12.6. Ideal Type of “The Artist”

To the ideal type of the artist, his/her TV series is a work of art. The focus of the ideal type is entirely on the expressiveness of the product. Art for art’s sake is the credo of this ideal type, the aim of the production of a TV series is expression by the individual creator(s). The emerging topics are content as expression, autonomy and artistic value, and the attitude towards audience and broadcasters.

### 12.6.1. Content Equals Expression Equals Art

At the artist ideal type, the debate on creation of TV series evolves strongly around quality as a product of expression, creativity, passion, and talent. The facets translate into valuable and unique series. Beraud thinks that creators, like novelists “do it first and foremost because they have a need to tell something and to express something.” Fischer says he is a producer, but also an artist.

Smith offers an example of the perspective on content of the artist type. In his series, he was inspired by photo artists:

“We wanted it to look quite magical. Although what was happening was quite gritty and tough. We wanted it not to look bleak, we wanted to find moments of (...) lyricism. (...). The camera gives you much deeper, more layered fields of vision. And it just made you do so many things with the background and the effects, and the changing light and everything.”

Grisoni says about engaging the audience with complex series:

“The successful ones, you always believe that the makers of the drama know what they’re talking about. Things tell you that someone knows that world. And they are now taking you into that world. [The series offer] a way of engaging you in the narrative with complex people who are not Hollywood cyphers. Who behave in the same strange ways that we all behave. So, it is not always logical. (...). Good, as we know, is not very interesting. ”

Van Passel engages creative talents at his production company. The writers and producers are on a wage and are not pressurized with deadlines. *Tabula Rasa* is created by one of the most talented showrunners. Gallagher summarizes about creative freedom to compose content: “The thing that (...) motivates you through this whole business is to hog the stage. To get the stage, to hold it and to have your views (...) and your creativity out there.” Smith says about valuable content:

“It takes you to a community that you might never experience. But whatever story you see won’t be purely closed, it won’t be just relevant to

that particular community. That story will have truths for any person and any community.”

Wännström could not make series of genres like fantasy, because she does not watch them. Passion is the basis of creation. In remakes, she stays close to the original voice of the series because that is what fascinated her in the first place. Grisoni says that success “comes from the storyteller being clear and informed and confident. This isn’t a cynical thing. This comes from a place of passion.”

Genres pose a challenge to the ideal type of the artist. Grisoni exemplifies:

“For me (...) as a maker, the interesting thing is cross-genre. You have to play with that genre. For the purposes of selling, people want to say, so, what is this genre? (...). [Genre is] just another pigeon hole, it is just another box.”

Irlé has produced with *Station Horizon* a modern western but does not care whether the audience recognizes the genre. He previously made a “film d’auteur” and had to tone challenging elements down for his TV series.

### **12.6.2. Autonomy, Integrity and Artistic Value**

The ideal type of the artist aims for the largest extent of autonomy in creating the TV series to guarantee its artistic value. Smith says: “I write author series, which means I like to write and create my own series.” Østerbye reasons: “Mostly you develop shows on your own or with another writer, so you know (...) better.” Scherfig agrees: “It is the writer’s ambition that is important. [Others shouldn’t] want to occlude the writer (...). [Without the autonomy] you wouldn’t have *The Bridge* or *The Killing*”. He recommends to stakeholders: “If you love somebody set them free.”

Grisoni criticizes the assessing of scripts at broadcasters because very few assessors dare to speak their mind to their “paymasters.” For a creator, “the only true thing you’ve got all the time is yourself, really.” Janssen sketches his reaction to lobbying attempts: “give us any stories (...) you want about any topic, but we will tackle it the way we want to do it.” Grotenhuis puts it vulgarly simple: “Stay true to yourself, fuck the critics.” Gylling wants to be in control over the series and the composition of the crew, also to reduce stress-related health problems. Winger says that creative authority causes the success of his series: “It is important that the creator supervises the process from beginning till end.” Kropf lauds a German series where the “crazily stubborn” creator had complete control and obsessed even over the smallest details. Gallagher says to potential clients: “This is what I would do for you. If this is not what you want, do not hire me. But don’t (...) start trying to mold me to some concept that you have.” Ahlgren sees the autonomy of creators established: “The head writer and the producer can say no to the broadcasters if (...) they really believe in something. And then they [the broadcasters] have to accept it.” Widman adds:

“When we come to that situation, that they want us to re-write everything, then we have to decide whether we believe in it or not. We start with an

idea and we develop it to a certain stage and then we present it, because we think it is good.”

Gabold says about selling his series to broadcasters: “I mean, if they (...) buy the DNA series, I’ll be happy, but I would never except that they (...) make any cuttings.” Van Passel changed broadcaster when the originally intended ad-based channel demanded adaptation of his series. In case of a successor series to *Der Bestatter*, Fischer would strongly prefer to have *carte blanche*.

As a head of drama, Mayor propagates the “one vision” in TV series, as opposed to “tutti frutti,” a “of collage of different talents.” Andreatta is lyrical about *La Linea Verticale*, an original series that is a “tragicomic account of the author’s true experience at the oncological urology department of a big hospital”. Lüthi confirms the importance of autonomy of creators and their vision in discussing the success of The Team. Scherfig propagates somewhat guilelessly: “You have to actually invite film people [to make] TV series, because they have higher ambitions, because they make art.” He adds that the very arty US series *Twin Peaks* was a defining inspiration to many acclaimed Danish creators.

The artist ideal type is willfully ignorant or recalcitrantly careless about the commonly applied benchmarks of success. Many creators express unawareness about sales, viewers, profits, etc. Smith and Grisoni are not sure whether their products are, e.g., available on streaming services. Scherfig finds that international distribution ambitions in production of series translate into copying American elements and are ruinous: if “you try to be international (...), it corrupts the originality in your story.” Gylling says about an “art” project she is developing:

“It is not going to attract a lot of people. And I’m extremely proud of it (...). my personal success (...) is the quality that I bring. (...). I like to touch people with what I write. I like to get out with it. But not at any cost.”

Smith reasons in the same vein:

“One Night is not going to be as international as a good old comfortable costume drama or detective series (...). But all the bits of story are completely true and universal (...). It will not have such a big appeal as a *Sherlock* or a *Downton Abbey* (...). These shows obviously travel much more easily.”

Success is only valid when achieved with content perceived by the creator as valuable. Terjung calls a product only a success if he likes it, no matter how many viewers saw it. A success is when he can tell the full story, i.e. the series is not prematurely cancelled. Grisoni says *Southcliffe* was not a success, but “it was for me because, we only ever addressed ourselves to what we felt was the truth. (...). I don’t add up the viewing figures. Someone else will do that but I don’t.”

Smith sees changes in the TV landscape:

“I do have hope for TV, now the big Hollywood people are producing such rubbish. (...) a lot of great writers and actors and producers are migrating now to television where they can (...) express themselves in a more intelligent, literate way.”

To this ideal type, the reasons for a lack of success are either enforced compromises on content or the product itself is badly constructed. Smith says: "Where plot takes over and the characters are kind of chasing the plot." The plot should be driven by the characters' personality and choices.

### **12.6.3. Attitude toward Audience**

The ideal type of the artist does not waste many thoughts on the audience and has, on occasion, a low opinion of it. "It is important as a creator to not just look at having a big audience" (Scherfig). Van Passel says: "Just make the thing you would like to see, you will be really proud [of it] and you will find your audience." Smith sees himself as niche writer. *One Night* treated salient issues in a very peculiar way. He doesn't think of the audience: "At the end of day you write what you would like to see yourself (...), a story you'd like to see yourself."

The ideal type does not assign the audience any influence and contrasts his/her own values with the audience's: "I think for the broad audience, realism is a big thing. For me personally (...) not" (Gylling). Janssen sees the audience needing help that the artist ideal type prefers not to provide. Innovation is important for Berggren, but the audience is traditional and adheres to familiar genres. Terjung does not want protagonists to guide the viewers, they must make up their own minds. Grisoni also does not believe in having audience considerations, it ruins the product. Wännström thinks neither of the audience nor of any broadcasters while producing, just of the series itself. Alber says: "I completely freed myself" from thoughts about the audience of the time slot and the genre. Fischer thinks that the creators can be much more courageous with *Der Bestatter*, like at *Twin Peaks*: "No one understands the plot, but it is cult." Lüthi states: "We are becoming more character- and less plot-driven (...). We challenge the audience at certain moments and at other times we are more mainstream." Alber confirms: "we are expanding the possibilities of the program time slot by narrating (...) more modern. (...). Constant dripping wears away the stone."

### **12.6.4. Attitude toward Broadcasters**

The artist does not have a high opinion of the competences of broadcasters pertaining to the actual creation of series. Van Passel says about his highly successful series *Clan*:

"It was a very black show and five women were at the steering wheel.  
(...). We had very difficult discussions with the commercial broadcasters.  
(...). Do not listen too much to what broadcasters say. Let them broadcast,  
(...). I've no idea how I should broadcast a show but let us do our shows."

Scherfig reminisces about a series for an ad-based broadcaster: "Later in the development process it has been hell. (...). It was the most horrifying experience I have ever had." Gylling sees the new landscape causing more control on the side of the creators, less at the broadcasters. Østerbye confirms. Van Passel observes that



“from the conception of the first idea to the airing (...) it takes four years. In that time, you see so [many] commissioning editors passing by [that] you don’t have to care (...) about who is saying what (...). they are all more some kind of managers than creative people. (...). Just go for your focus and try to make your show as good as possible.”

Terjung views the broadcasters’ delegates as unpredictable, inconsequent and unreliable. Another interviewee is equally critical and says that the decision-making by large committees results in the production “of a camel, not a race horse.”

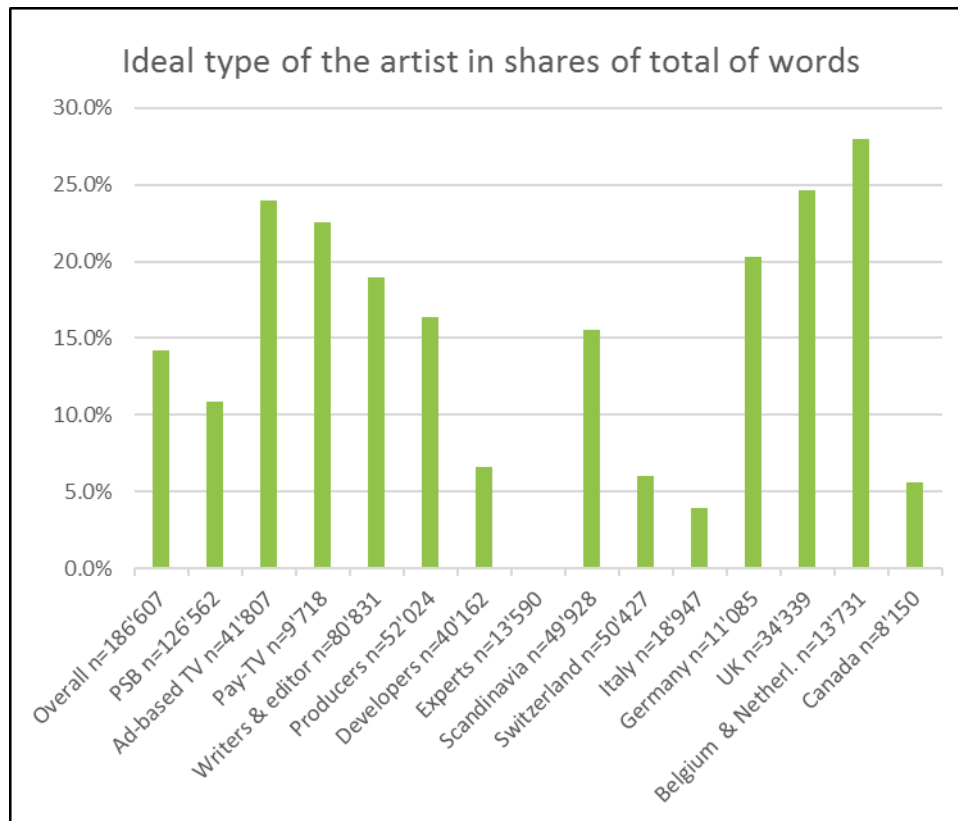
Interviewees plead for more leverage of writers over content. Smith sees an aversion against innovation: “A lot of the time there is a schedule and amounts of stuff that the networks have to put out, they do tend to rely on established ideas.” Van Passel emphasizes his independence from broadcasters: “If they ask for a pilot, I would go somewhere else.”

On occasion, the ideal type of the artist is also valid for broadcasters. The Danish PSB DR managed a turnaround of the desolate fiction offering by producing a string of artistic and commercial successes, as almost all Scandinavian interviewees, as well as several other respondents, never tire of declaring. Attention lies on the unique processes and stubbornly sought-after goals of a succession of decision-makers who are described as innovative creators themselves. Beraud, as head of drama of a PSB, applies values in greenlighting that conform to the artist type as well: originality, unique voices, freshness, etc.: “We avoid [program] fillers.”

#### **12.6.5. Prominence of “The Artist”**

As Figure 24 shows, the artist is most salient among the Belgian, Dutch and UK respondents, as well as among ad-based and pay-TV suppliers. The type is absent among the experts, and marginal among the Italian and Canadian respondents. The type is also not very prominent in the subsamples of Swiss interviewees and developers.

Figure 24. Prominence per subsample of ideal type of 'The Artist' in shares of total number of words



The artist n=26'543 words in statements assigned to the ideal type

## 12.6.6. Overview

- TV series are expression, art products
- Cultural value of personal expression is only goal, requires independence and integrity of process
- Cultural enlightenment of audience secondary goal
- Commercial targets and remuneration ignored
- External influences (by audience, broadcaster, financiers, team) are unwanted, impact on result regarded as negative
- Edification of audience to enable engagement with valuable product
- Success: acknowledgement of artistic value of creator's product in industry and public cultural domain
- Broadcasters only have task of enabling access
- Societal relevance (as perceived by recipients) emerges from creators' expression

Exemplary evidence is also rendered in abundance in subchapter 9.7, and some in 9.6. In subchapter 9.5 evidence of the contentious relation of the artist with the broadcaster is presented.

## IV Conclusion

### 13. Summary and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings of the literature on influences on content, societal relevance as success factor, other success factors of TV series and ideal types of creators as well as the results of the present study are summarized, contrasted and discussed.

#### 13.1. Influences on Content of TV Series

In this subchapter, I discuss the literature and the results of the present study pertaining to the five levels of influences on content of TV series.

##### **Social System Level Influences**

The social system is the most macro level of the 'Hierarchy of Influences' model. In the reviewed literature, the influences at this level are sparsely discussed. TV series are created within varying capitalist systems and are at times constrained by political-ideological sub-systems and the perceived Zeitgeist. Some influences on content of the dominant cultural/socio-political climate and tradition are made out.

The in the data evidenced influences of the political subsystem are distinguished into political interventionism (that mainly constrains creation and mediation), the political-ideological Zeitgeist (which enables and constrains messages) and the socio-cultural and socio-political environment (influences that predominantly enable certain societally relevant messages and constrain some others).

Creators describe how partisan media politics influence broadcasters, program contents and the offer of TV series. Political interventions by right-wing parties with the contents of PSB TV series occur in Italy and Denmark. The PSBs deny any political influence. Italy is assigned to the Mediterranean 'Polarized Pluralist' Model by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and the political interference is a confirmation of this characterization. Denmark, on the other hand, is assigned to the 'Democratic Corporatist Model' and the political interventions contradict the qualification as far as autonomy of media and the degree of political parallelism are concerned. In other cases, creators practice anticipatory obedience to conservative pressure and self-censoring to prevent allegations of a left-wing bias. None of these PSB-related political influences are highlighted in literature.

In accordance with observations by Martin (2014) and Keller (2010), TV series reflect the political-ideological trends, according to some interviewees: populist sentiments are mirrored in certain series (Italy, Belgium) and current social issues are at times critically addressed in German and British TV series. The social commentaries structurally incorporated in Scandinavian (PSB) TV series are a condensation of the region's longstanding tradition of intertwining entertaining fiction with societally relevant commentary, as Redvall (2013) indicates. The wider premises of Shoemaker, Reese (2014) and Hesmondhalg (2012) that the media are

instruments of power for the elites in society are of a highly abstract nature and are, also due to the data gathering method, here not evidenced.

The interviewees uncover cultural characteristics and trends that shape the popularity of genres, as well as the content, messages and general mood of TV series. The amorality and counter-esthetics of current high-end TV series follow an established penchant in art, theatre and literature. This is to an extent in line with observations by Sepinwall (2012) and Martin (2014) on the reflection in TV series of broader cultural developments. Respondents relate national cultural and social facets to the audience demands pertaining to TV fiction. The safer the country feels, the more titillation in the sense of amorality and shock value is appreciated. On the other hand, in places where the lives of people are permanently challenged, a preference for moralistic content in traditional stories is apparent.

### **Institutional Level Influences**

In the literature on the institutional level of influences on content of TV series, abundant indicators are sketched for the radical changes in the TV landscape and the ensuing consequences for the TV series market. From the network era, through the multi-channel era to the post-network era and the surge of (online) video-on-demand in the 2010s, a strong proliferation of channels and offerings has occurred. An increasing number of technologies, suppliers, TV series and types of contents and messages are available to a progressively fragmented audience that is, by some scholars, accredited with more leverage on the market than in the past. The relevant features of the last decade are a diminution of linear TV consumption and phased circulation of TV series, strong decreases of market shares of traditional broadcasters, increasing globalization of multi-platform web-based distribution of content, and audience loyalty based increasingly on content, not on broadcasters. PSBs are important players in the production of TV series in Europe and are severely besieged.

In the data of this study, the new media landscape enables creation of TV series more than it constrains: many channels are open. The TV series market is accredited with more constraining influences than a facilitating impact on creation: the competition is intense and the US domineers. Audience use patterns (cord-cutting, away from the traditional big broadcasters, power accumulation of few global players), dependency on financiers, and media policy (besieged PSBs reduce production of domestic original series) are predominantly perceived as constraining the creation of TV series.

The respondents see TV series thriving in the current media landscape. Writers positively assess the growth of the market for TV series in Europe within the last decade. Mentioned are an increased demand for series, more potential customers and, correspondingly – at least in theory – a stronger influence on the content on part of the creators. The surge of TV series is related to new powerful players that enter the market and strongly influence the industry. The evidence is in line with Lotz's findings (2014) for the post-network era. Similarly argue Schlütz (2016), Sperb (2017), Martin (2014, Sepinwall (2012). Additional findings are that the new streaming services, as well as the established pay-TV suppliers, pressure the traditional

broadcasters. This development adds to the woes of the besieged PSBs that Hesmondhalg (2012) makes out. Many respondents see streaming services having the competitive advantage because of information on consumption, audience targeting and aggregation of many different niche audiences on one platform. The traditional broadcasters deploy various strategies to compete, of which some are negatively assessed by respondents. Some respondents believe that a situation of co-existence between all the suppliers will emerge.

The TV series industry reacted to the increased demand with over-production, as Adalian (2015) also infers. Respondents observe that finding an audience for a product is becoming very challenging. Lotz (2014) and Schlütz (2016) interpret this as a shift in market power toward the audience; a framing of the subject that is not shared by the respondents.

The dependency on financiers, that is – pertaining to the US industry – mentioned by many writers in Kallas (2014), is evidenced in the data for European industries and is reducing the influence of creators on the content of their series. Due to ever-increasing production costs, the dependency is becoming increasingly problematic for creators. Several cost reduction strategies are established: tax cuts, subsidization and co-production. All solutions evoke constraints to the creators and a loss of constituting power over content.

The traditional financiers of TV series in Europe undergo budget cuts and loss of revenues. Respondents see the narrative space of TV series reduced: fewer series and episodes are ordered. The production output of pay-TV is of strongly increasing importance but is not yet very voluminous in terms of numbers of series. Traditional broadcasters will also have to swallow further decreases in advertising income. Creators must adapt considerations about advertising to the new media landscape with many platforms serving niche audiences.

### **Organization Level Influences**

The influences of the commissioning and/or financing organizations (usually the broadcasters) of TV series are prominent in the literature. The organizations' strategies, policies, mandates, management, audience targeting and advertising customers are attributed influences on content. Regarding societally relevant messages, constraints are most often discussed. However, some organizations are accredited with an inclination to produce, finance and broadcast TV series with relevant content: PSBs in Europe and premium cable providers in the US.

The main attention lies on the business model of organizations: PSB, ad-based TV and pay-TV are the relevant distinctions in this study regarding content of TV series. The positioning, background and particularities of the PSB organizations in each of the sampled countries exercise influences on the content of the PSBs' TV series. Ad-based TV is mostly described as governed by the strategy to attract the largest possible audience for advertising clients, which leads to numerous multi-faceted constraints regarding TV series' content and messages. The challenge for pay-TV suppliers consists of finding an audience willing to (continue to) pay in a highly competitive market. Evidence for the lack of restrictions on and interference with content in pay-TV is manifold. However, some authors highlight the fact that the

organizations are also profit-oriented entities which inevitably produces (other forms of) constraints.

The analysis of the data shows that organizations exert a large influence on the content of TV series. This is in line with stipulations by Redvall (2013) on the importance of the experts in the 'field' of the systems model of Csikszentmihalyi (1988). Ad-based broadcasters are perceived as predominantly constraining creation, PSBs constrain as well but are chiefly enabling TV series, and the not very salient pay-TV broadcasters enable creation. The (ad-based and PSB) broadcasters' interpretations of their goals and mandates and the budgets that are made available are perceived as (slightly) more constraining than enabling TV series' content and messages. Writers and producers see the broadcasters' (control) policies as constraining, the developers in the service of the organizations assess it - unsurprisingly - as promoting creation and mediation. The target audience exercises mainly an ambiguous influence, creation and mediation are constrained as well as enabled.

Alleged or communicated demands of the client-organization impact the decisions of the creators on the content of their series, confirming that the creators are the weaker party in this constellation (von Rimscha & Przybylski, 2012). In line with findings of McQuail 2010, pp. 292-293), self-censorship and anticipatory obedience are not uncommon among the creators but are in many occasions not acknowledged as such: it comes with the trade. Several creators comply and see the impact as acceptable, others express dissatisfaction with the influence of the requirements of the broadcaster and its construct audience, especially in the light of non-transparency and volatility of the demands as communicated by the client. Thus, the findings of Roberts (2010) that there exists a large extent of mutual understanding between organization-oriented decision-makers and creators are not confirmed.

The influences of broadcasters are distinguished along business models by the creators. The distinction is very prominent in the work of Kallas (2014), Martin (2014) and Sepinwall (2012), where the US ad-based networks are severely criticized for constraining creativity and messages and the pay-TV channels are predominantly favorably discussed. Furthermore, in scholarly studies by Lotz (2014), Havens and Lotz (2017), and Sperb (2017), the influences on content related to the business model of the broadcaster are prominent. In the data, the constraints (mostly induced by audience, ratings, and program considerations) on topics, genres, and messages are fewest for the pay-TV broadcasters. This finding supports observations by many authors, mainly pertaining to HBO (e.g., Edgerton & Jones, 2008b, 2008a; Leverette et al., 2008; Lotz & Haggins, 2008; McCabe & Akass, 2007, 2008a; Schlütz, 2016). Respondents see as advantages of the pay-TV business model: the aggregation of niche audiences, a large potential (international) audience, large budgets for production and promotion, little bureaucracy, and a strong focus on content, scripts, and capturing an audience. In addition, pay-TV broadcasters are inclined to tackling controversial issues (possibly for publicity reasons).

The PSB business model is the most prominent in the sample and the influence on content exerted by PSBs is very large. The findings are broadly in line with the

position of PSBs in their national media sector as sketched by Hesmondhalg (2012). Most PSBs adhere strongly to mandates that are deployed to impose restrictions on type, genre, content and messages of series. The organizations show an inclination toward large mainstream audiences and, in fewer instances, toward societally relevant topics. The exerting of influence on content varies among the PSBs but is generally at a higher level than in pay-TV. The assessment by creators of the policies of the PSBs varies equally strong: the Scandinavians mostly describe a balanced and fruitful rapport between creators and PSB delegates, which confirms the findings of Redvall (2013). In most other countries, the relationship is discussed controversially: good and bad experiences are reported, pros and cons mentioned. The findings for Germany confirm the conclusions of Krauss (2018, p. 47) that creators see specific traditions and hierarchies constraining the production of complex, 'dark', high-end series.

For the PSBs speak, according to a substantial share of creators: a large potential audience size, relatively high budgets, many competences and resources, good reputation and strong impact on the national level, a mandate to enlighten and promote culture, a varied topical emphasis, a degree of willingness to take risk and innovate. A large minority of the interviewees criticizes PSB policies (strongly): large bureaucracy and sluggish decision-making, exuberant focus on mainstream topics, formats and market shares, formulaic production and contents, conservatism, fear of controversy and of political engagement.

The organizations with the ad-based TV business model are the most controversially discussed of the three. Most of the respondents that can inform on ad-based TV broadcasters describe unsatisfactory outcomes of supplying the organizations with proposals, scripts or finalized TV series content. The level of interference, of exercising influence on content, is the highest for the ad-based broadcasters. The most criticized features and policies are: overestimation of the importance of ratings; incompetent, fearful and volatile strategies and decision-making; conservatism in formats, topics, cast and crew; fixation on an inadequately established construct audience; a derogatory attitude towards viewers; the intrusion by commercial breaks; the lack of interest in relevant topics; the avoidance of controversy; a lack of respect for culture, creators and content. However, positive experiences (of other respondents) are regularly reported too. Basically, all the cons are at times contradicted and the positive opposite is described. Nevertheless, the general influence of the dependence on advertising, large audiences and the subsequent tendency towards mainstream-conform content is undisputed.

It must be noted, however, that the outcome of cooperation with, or supplying to, the (PSB and ad-based) broadcasters, as assessed by interviewees, very strongly depends on the persona of the representative of the client organization: competence, opinions, and character determine to a larger extent the satisfaction with the result. This facet is largely ignored in the scholarly studies, but examples of the importance of personal relations for the outcome of a TV series project are rendered in the trade press works by Kallas (2014), Martin (2014), and Sepinwall (2012).

The budget of a TV series is (mainly) made available by the broadcaster. The control over the budget gives the broadcaster additional leverage over the production and the content. Evidence is rendered by Redvall (2013), Lotz (2014), Sperb (2016), Havens and Lotz (2017), as well as in works on HBO and Quality TV by amongst others Schlütz (2016), Nesselhauf and Schleich (2014a), McCabe and Akass (2007, 2008a), and, lastly, also in the trade press investigations by Kallas (2014), Martin (2014), and Sepinwall (2012). The size of the budget has a strong influence on the content of TV series. In the data, the budget of series is less contentiously debated than in the trade press works. Most creators accept the budget size as a given. Obviously, a higher budget would have improved the content in the eyes of the creators. The disadvantages of a (too) low budget impact the quality of the product in a highly competitive market that is part of a TV landscape invaded by many products of new powerful distributors and broadcasters.

Respondents report that the considerations of the broadcaster pertaining to the target audience influence the content of TV series at times unduly strong. Many constraints are imposed based on what the construct audience accepts, as Lotz (2014) and Sperb (2017) also found to an extent. Most respondents express a degree of willingness to take audience considerations seriously, a minority sees the translation of audience features and preferences by the broadcaster as per se faulty and ignorable, which is in line with von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, p. 1011) who observe a negative attitude towards (audience) research in the media entertainment industry.

McQuail (2010, pp. 331-333) lists types of decision-making in media. In overview, the “assembly line” (factory-like) model is in the present study - besides the institutionalized pitching/greenlighting procedures, and overproduction in development of scripts - not very salient in the creation of TV series. More salient seems the model of “craft and entrepreneurship.” It pertains here to the large influence of reputable and/or highly competent and motivated creators in the US and to some extent in Europe (head writers, but foremost developers). In the model, powerful brokers assemble and govern the TV series project and constrain other stakeholders. The model suits creators of the crafter, artist and messenger ideal types best. Adhering to successful genres, formats and recipes is a salient tendency that matches the third model of “convention and formula.” This decision-making model is a source of constraints on creation imposed by, mainly, broadcasters’ representatives and is salient at the audience servant and at the salesperson ideal types. Audience considerations are in the data not as prominent as one might expect in ‘mass’ entertainment but are still influential. As the label indicates, the “audience image and conflict” model can lead to contentiously evaluated constraints that base on a construct audience. The model clearly suits the audience servant ideal type. Salient is (at e.g., the paymaster servant ideal type) also the “product image” model where a TV series project is geared towards achieving the acceptance by decision makers in the next realization phase, e.g., adapting a script to broadcasters, or changing elements for syndication of a series.

### **Routines Level Influences**



The influences on the routines level entail the development and production routines. The work burden of writing TV series is large and often creative teams (in the US of mainly writers) are required to execute the task. This potentially constrains the influence of the individual creators of TV series. The writer's room is a traditional production process deployed in the US. The practiced procedures, atmosphere and hierarchy vary strongly and shape the decision making on the content of TV series and any societally relevant elements. Genres and types of TV series are regarded as storytelling routines that influence content of TV series. Series with long story arches and the meta-genre 'Quality TV' are more open to the inclusion of societally relevant messages. The same is posed for TV series that transgress traditional genres and deploy narrative complexity. Various scholars single out the horror, supernatural, science fiction, lifeworld and political drama, and comedy genres as the likely vehicles for messages.

The influences on content of TV series placeable on the routines level of the conceptual model of Shoemaker and Reese are numerous in the data. The process of creation is important for the product and is a prominently discussed topic in the interviews and in Redvall (2013). However, it does not systematically constrain or enable the creation and the inclusion of messages. In the eyes of the respondents, teamwork and the division of labor in it enable more than constrain creation. The actual decision-making (in the production team, which often includes the broadcasters' liaison) is predominantly perceived as constraining. This notion does not match the Danish picture in Redvall (2013) but is in line with findings of Phalen and Osselame (2012). The pitching and greenlighting procedures are by nature constraining processes and are strongly perceived as such. The sources of material enable creation. In contrast, genres and types of series, that cater to (construct) audience needs, predominantly constrain creative work.

The task of producing series is carried out by large teams. A writers' room as central script production process (cf. Henderson, (2009); Phalen and Osselame, (2012)) is implemented to some extent in Europe. More common in the data is a production inner circle of writers, producers and, in quite some cases, a developer in the service of the commissioning broadcaster, as Redvall (2013) found for Danish PSB production. Within the inner circle, consensus-building is often strived for. The motto 'one vision,' as adopted from the US industry and turned into one of the dogmas (cf. Redvall, 2013) of the Danish PSB, is progressively replaced by a 'shared vision' which confirms the observations by Mann (2009) and Kallas (2014) who reject the 'author' principle in TV series. The composition of functions in the creative team and the chemistry between the involved actors may influence the extent of success of the series.

The most important influence on content on the routines level stems from the decision-making in the inner circle of production of the TV series. What makes it into the script and later into the actual series is the result of the functioning of, and hierarchy within, the inner circle of key creators. Some creators mention flat hierarchies and balanced decision-making, whereby the head writer has the most influence. Most respondents describe hierarchical decision-making outcomes. To

numerous respondents, strong leadership over TV series is commendable for a comprehensive vision to permeate the product. However, in quite some cases, the leverage lies with the wrong (people in certain) functions: incompetent producers, and decision-makers at broadcasters. It must be noted with respect to the last observation that the biggest group of respondents reasons from the perspective of writers. In contrast to Phalen and Osellame (2012), no conflicts among writers were evidenced.

Another very influential factor is the selection process of proposed TV series (pitching/greenlighting), which constrains the expression by creators and the range of content and messages, as the data show. In literature, ample examples are rendered by Kallas (2014), Martin (2014), and Sepinwall (2012). Redvall (2013) finds a complicated but not essentially constraining process at DR.

The genre and type of TV series have influence on the narrative bandwidth and on the possibility to include intentional messages, the data show, thereby confirming work by Boyken (2014), Danneil (2014), Fischer (2014) Nesselhauf and Schleich (2014b), Ritzer (2014), and Schlütz (2016). Drama, serials and high-end products stand out positively in this respect, but comedies are also mentioned. The genre and type of TV series also influence the success of TV series in terms of serving audience demands, as Lotz (2014) points out. The transgression of genres is an artistic ambition, which might deliver reputational gains but is often not suited for commercial broadcasters and mainstream audiences. The latter finding contradicts scientific (but largely unempirical) works (Kosnik, 2013; Lotz, 2013; Mittell, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2013; Scheurer, 2014; Schlütz, 2016). Transgression and complexity might pay off for creators in the cultural industry, the 'domain' of the systems model of Csikszentmihalyi (cf. Redvall, 2013) in the sense of showing the potential to supply elite/niche broadcasters, channels and audiences.

### **Individual Level Influences**

The individual level of influences on TV series is most strongly acknowledged in the public (media) discourse on TV series. The literature indicates that the influences of the series' writer, producer, or showrunner are constrained by many factors. Nevertheless, scholars mention the influences on TV series' content by the creators' dispositions, attitudes, and opinions, but also of their hierarchical positions, roles and power. In the final verdict, actual individuals integrate societally relevant messages in TV series. Of these individuals, (head) writers are generally accredited with the most direct influence on content of TV series. The showrunner (head writer/executive producer) is regarded as the individual function that is granted the strongest constituting leverage over TV series' content. In Denmark, next to head writers, developers of TV series in the service of a PSB are singled out as a potent category of decision-makers on content.

In an overview of the tendencies in the gathered data pertaining to individual influence, the developers have large leverage over TV series and are very seldom overruled in decision-making. Writers have an equally large influence, but evidence for curtailment is substantial. The leverage of producers is not contested but is less salient. The showrunner is very rare, has large influence, but the existence in Europe

of this omnipotent function is often denied. Stars (actors) are ascribed leverage but are seldom mentioned.

Writers have a strong influence on the content of TV series, the data show. This confirms findings of Ethridge (2008), Pearson (2005), Messenger Davies (2007), Munt and Redvall (2009). Any societally relevant content elements would have to be first written up in the script. These elements can be included for many reasons, from personal attitudes, values, ethics and opinions, esthetic ambitions, to professional and business considerations. However, the influence of writers depends on the permissive tolerance of other influential functionaries, foremost developers in the service of the financing organization, and in several cases, producers representing the hired production company. Reputable staffs ('star' actors; writers, producers and developers with expertise and a track record) exercise influence that can, on occasion, constrain or overrule the other content influencers. The collective support for a comprehensive vision disseminated in a TV series seems crucial, as Redvall (2013) indicates. In the best practice examples, an early consensus is reached on the 'one vision' that encompasses the entire series.

The establishment of showrunners, a function with absolute authority over all facets of production of a TV series, as is the case in several US TV series (cf. Martin, 2014, and Sepinwall, 2012, and the scholars Ethridge, (2008), Pearson, (2005), Messenger Davies, (2007), and Munt, (2006)), is not common in the sample. It is an ambition of many writers to be a showrunner, and the concentration of power is acknowledged as a success factor (albeit only of famous series made by others) by most developers and some producers.

The importance and creative influence of developers on the content of TV series emerges in the data mainly at PSBs, but also at ad-based channels. This facet is except for Redvall (2013) not acknowledged by scientific and trade press observers. Martin (2014) and Sepinwall (2012) mention the influence of top managers at broadcasters on several TV series.

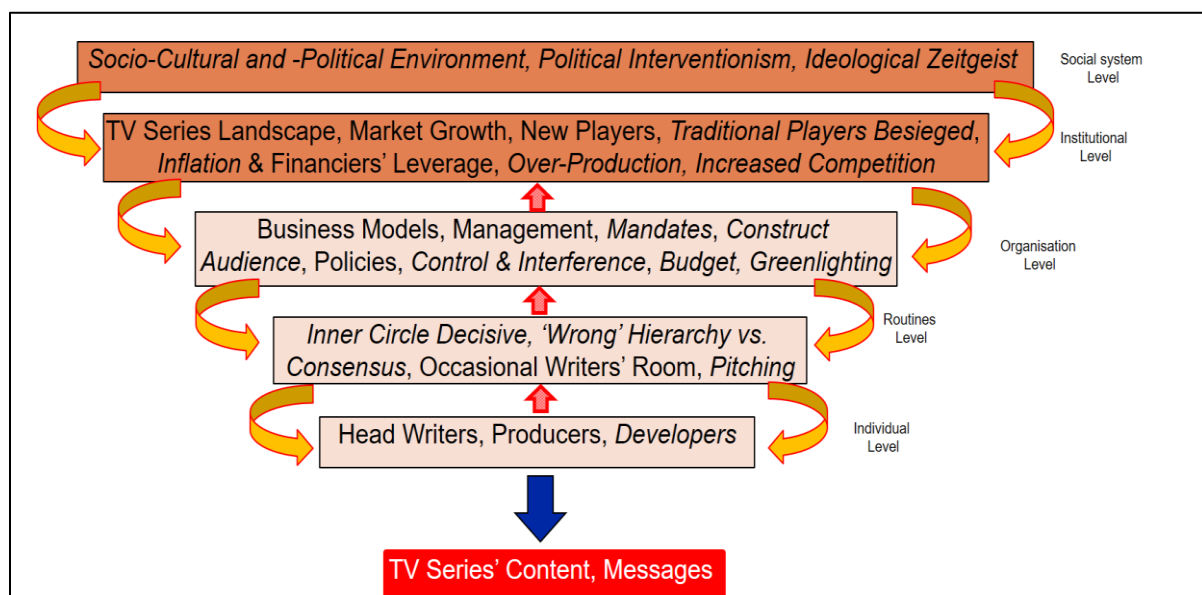
In the attribution of strong influence to individual writers and creatives in general, it is feasible that an element of social desirability emerges in the data. In the discourse on critically acclaimed TV series in the public sphere, the main script author (showrunner) is commonly singled out as the decisive creative force, in an attempt (common to media) to simplify, personalize, and put a face on collective endeavors. Respondents might be inclined to join the choir singing the praise of lone creator-geniuses in order to not seem unintelligent and outdated.

### **Overview: Perceived Influences on Content of TV Series**

Figure 25 offers an overview of the perceived influences on the content of TV series that emerged in the data of the study. The influences written in *italics* did not emerge (strongly) in the literature discussed in chapter 5. On the social system level, the socio-cultural and -political environment, political interventionism and adherence to the ideological Zeitgeist emerge as influences on content. Few were rendered in the sparse literature on this level. On the social institution level, the difficulties of the traditional players (PSBs and ad-based channels), inflation of costs and an exuberant level of (international) competition emerge, next to in the literature

established influences. On the organization level, the relevance of mandates (mainly of PSBs, but also pay-TV and ad-based broadcasters), control and interference by broadcasters, budgets and greenlighting policies and procedures all emerge stronger in the data than in the literature. On the routines level, intensely debated are the inner circle of decision-making, enabling and constraining examples of hierarchy and consensus building, and the process of pitching to broadcasters. On the individual level, the function of showrunner that is relatively prominent in the literature does not emerge in the sample as often-deployed, and developers have an influential function barely discerned in the (US) literature.

Figure 25. Overview of perceived influences on content of TV series



### 13.2. Success Factors of TV Series

The generic meta-categories of success factors of media products are introduced in the literature review (chapter 7) and are based on Sommer et al. (2016) and Verhoeven et al. (2017). These two studies are – in turn – founded on numerous (empirical) investigations of success factors of (predominantly) one media type, format or product.

In the data, creators interpret success of TV series in various ways. Most salient in this respect are large audiences and/or high market shares. Continuation, syndication and remakes of TV series are all indicators of success. Realizing a developed project is another (earlier) measure. Impact on cultural/political discourse, good reviews, awards, audience involvement and reputational gains of makers and disseminators are also indicators of success.

Regarding success factors, all meta-categories are also applicable to TV series, the data show. Content is, like societal relevance, the focus of this study and is perceived by creators as a very important success factor of TV series. The tailoring of

content for diverging target audiences, as well as the quality, the genre and the presence of stars contribute to success in the eyes of creators. The 'star' factor is said to be less important in TV series than in film and other TV formats.

Of the other generic success factors, the most salient is organization aspects, before marketing, internal processes, environmental orientation, distribution and external evaluation. Least salient in the data are form/design, leadership, and human resources.

Within the meta-category organizational facets, most important are in descending order: support by the organization (usually the broadcaster), its budget, syndication of TV series, and the degree to which the TV series matches the broadcaster. Less important are co-productions and other cooperations by the broadcaster, its network, its internal cooperation and its size.

Marketing is an important category of success factors predominantly located downstream in the value chain of TV series. Most valued is marketing of TV series on the audience market by advertising. Internal processes are prominently discussed. Within the meta-category, the resources and budget of a TV series are most relevant ahead of development and production processes. Pertaining to environmental orientation, the important success factors are local references, deployment of the audience's language and monitoring the TV series market. Within the meta-category distribution, timing (of broadcasting or release) is most prominent ahead of the deployment of multiple platforms. The meta-category of success factors' external evaluation reflects the importance of the resonance of TV series in the market or audience. Word-of-mouth about the series and reviews are highlighted by creators.

Three meta-categories are the least salient. Within the weakly emphasized meta-category form, quality is most prominent, before consistency of design. The meta-category leadership is of limited importance and so are human resources. Both categories and the factors they consist of are less well applicable to the nature of project work on TV series. Pertaining to HR, competence and reputation of the involved workers are valued most.

### **13.3. Societal Relevance as Success Factor of TV Series**

Media misrepresent social reality by disseminating (distorted and distorting) stereotypes. Portrayals depicted in the very popular format of TV series warrant close investigation.

The depiction of women on TV has been under intense investigation for decades. In general, women are – compared to men – underrepresented and more often portrayed in settings and roles with lower social status. Over time, women become more salient on TV which reflects the changes in the social fabric of the US. On TV, strong female characters are regularly depicted to appeal to a predominantly female audience. However, this type of character continues to be managed, controlled, restrained and punished in the narrative. Western white middle-class women are mostly portrayed, often in pitiful or other traditionally conservative ways. The patriarchal vision shines strongest through in the highly stereotyped

depiction of working women. Several fictional TV series inspire analyses of the depiction of women. On *Sex and the City*, the verdict is controversial. Some scholars credit the series with opening the discourse on female independence, assertiveness, careers, sexuality, friendships, etc. which paved the way for a string of series with emancipating messages. Others criticize the series' neo-liberal, materialistic, class-based, unrealistic and/or pseudo-feminist depictions. *Girls* is lauded for its realistic and liberated portrayal of women in their 20s with different backgrounds while *Mad Men* is acclaimed for depicting the women's struggle from the 50s to the 70s through strong and complex female characters.

Regarding the second main social segregator, ethnicity, the depiction of African Americans is the most salient topic of scholarly analysis. Throughout the last decades, pressure groups have alerted the public and the TV industry to misrepresentation of this group. Generally, African American stereotypes emphasize the disparities from white people and serve to validate the group's disadvantaged position in society. Scholars discern different phases in the portrayal of the African American community on TV. Even in the best of phases, African Americans are depicted as subordinated to other social groups and their representation is mostly limited to less prestigious TV formats. In so-called 'realistic' fiction, for the storytellers a dilemma surfaces between positive, potentially edifying and emancipating portrayals that subsequently get criticized for misrepresenting the reality of many Afro Americans, and negative 'realistic' depictions that are then said to reinforce stereotypes. The outsourcing of negative Afro American stereotypes to the lower class is another discerned problem. Scholars evaluate positively some of the depictions in TV series like *Treme*, *The Wire*, *Grey's Anatomy*, etc., but the general verdict on serial fiction remains one of a strongly distorted image of African Americans. The toxic mix of discriminatory bias pertaining to gender and ethnicity shows its negative magnitude in the fictional portrayals of African American women. Even the well-respected *The Wire* is criticized. Different demeaning stereotypes persist in fictional depictions of African American women on the one hand and men on the other. Comedies of the last decade are positively evaluated for offering a more diverse picture of African Americans. Pertaining to other non-Caucasian groups and non-Christian religions, similarly negative findings are formulated. The stereotype of Indian Americans evolves around the hard-working, semi-affluent "model minority" stereotype, and the representation of women is limited to their physique and its sexual implications.

Commonly, class refers to the positioning within a system of unequal access to resources. The dwindling of the middle-classes and the impoverishing of the working-classes are discerned as prominent sociological tendencies. Compared to the other main social segregators, class was a less salient research topic. Scholars find that skewed portrayals in TV (fiction), like over-representing the affluent and middle classes whilst omitting the lower classes, can enhance distorted views of society and influence the self-image of recipients and attitudes on relevant socio-political issues. The false representation of working classes is seen as a result of various factors: no access of the working class to media production; the values, organizational processes,

and human judgement of (companies of) media producers; commercialization, and the losses of political power of the working-class. In sitcoms, scholars find that nothing has changed in the negative depictions of lower classes in 70 years. The under-representation of 'blue collar' classes equals 'symbolic annihilation.' Some relevant changes, like the portrayals of non-traditional families, occur in family sitcoms in the 2010s, but negative portrayals of working class (men) and manual labor remain. TV series (*Downton Abbey*, *The Crown*) vindicate unequal distribution of wealth and power and deploy a complete reversal of reality: the upper classes work hard in expensive high-end fiction, whereas the lower classes are portrayed as idle and tasteless hedonists in cheap scripted reality TV shows. Over the decades, the 'scrounger' portrayal of lower classes coincides with, and legitimizes, conservative attacks on welfare spending and unemployment benefits. In general, fiction and reality TV validate the increasing divergence between rich and poor.

Sexuality is another main social segregator. LGBT characters have always been shown on TV, but the portrayals changed from almost exclusively negative and emphasizing deviance to a more mixed overall picture that (also) offers room for some emancipating and validating depictions. However, homosexuality is still often framed as a 'problem' that evokes on occasion sensitive treatment. Tolerance or sympathy are focused on specific homosexual TV personalities, not on the communities. Indicators of positive change in the depiction of LGBT are found in, for example, *Six Feet Under*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Modern Family*, *Queer as Folk* and *The L word*.

Political content is inherently societally relevant and the dissemination of socio-political messages in fiction is an often-ignored research field. Scholars find that socio-political messages are frequently mediated in fiction and impact perceptions, attitudes and behavior. The depiction of politics and politicians is of importance since the audience is made up of potential voters. In addition, the exploration of certain political issues is better in fiction than in information offers. However, scholars find mainly negative (and inaccurate) portrayals (in the UK) of corruption of politicians. However, some illustrious series, like *The West Wing*, offer positive, and (in US series) even heroic depictions.

Controversial topics are a key feature (and, some say, an important success factor) of high-end, or 'Quality TV' products and are thought to challenge mainstream attitudes, which can activate opinion building on current social topics. This may induce behavioral changes and challenges to legalistic justice. TV series perform a commentary role versus the dominant ideology and discourse in society. Controversial topics are moralistically simplified in advertising-based TV, whereas pay-TV offers a more serious treatment. Researchers investigate the treatment of specific controversial topics in (genres of) TV series. Prison, lifeworld and family dramas are vehicles for social critique. Scholars find the treatment of controversial topics in several TV series not fulfilling its full critical potential in a relevant arena of socio-political opinion making.

Scholars interpret realism in varying ways. The presence of real-existing characters, places, themes, and an absence of a storytelling time-lapse is one

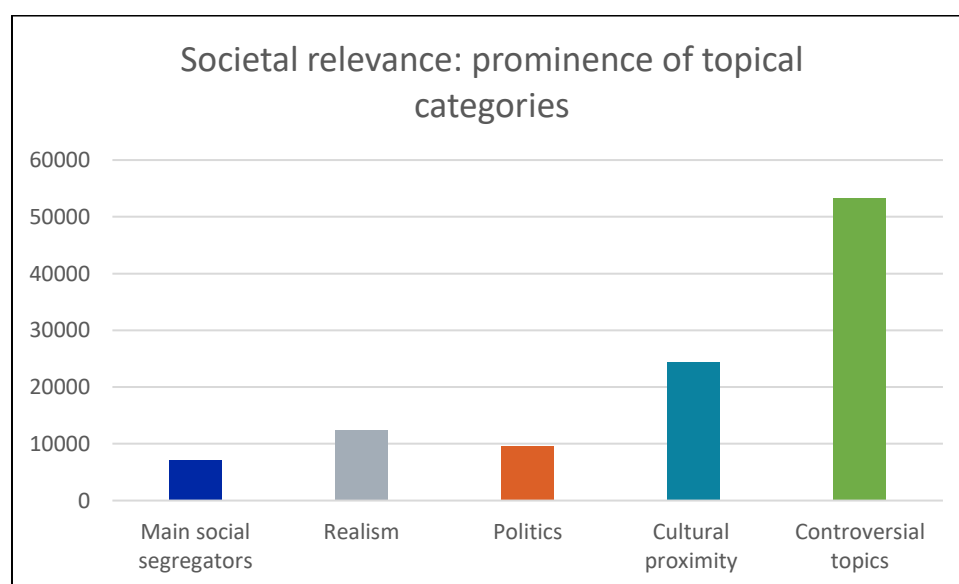
operationalization. Another one is social realism, where identification with characters and social position is enabled and content elements are logically connected. Additional central elements of realism brought forward are invisibility of storytelling strategies, motivated actions, recognizability, deployment of real time and everyday experience depictions.

A direct connection between ‘societally relevant’ messages, topics and traits and success of TV series is made in studies pertaining to *The Killing* (interwoven storytelling on political intrigue, private lives, police work), *Miami Vice* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (content addressing Caucasian-racist neuroses), *Orange is the New Black* (reflection on prisons, homosexuality, transgender, crime, but also criticized for a hegemonic perspective), *Sex and the City* (appeal to post-feminist trends), *Modern Family* (gay parenting, alternatives to traditional family life), *Dexter* (vigilante justice).

### 13.4. The Creators’ Perception of Societal Relevance as Success Factor

In the present investigation, European respondents and one Canadian interviewee outline the elements they regard as societally relevant and assess the contribution of these elements to the success of TV series. The elements diverge from the ones that are in the reviewed literature discussed for predominantly US TV series. As mentioned before, societal relevance is closely connected with the country of origin of the series. It follows that direct comparisons between the topics in the literature and the data findings are impracticable or irrelevant. However, on a more abstract level, some divergences between general patterns discerned in the literature and the data of the present study on can be made out.

Figure 26. Prominence of categories of societal relevance in number of words



n=106'981 words in statements assigned to categories

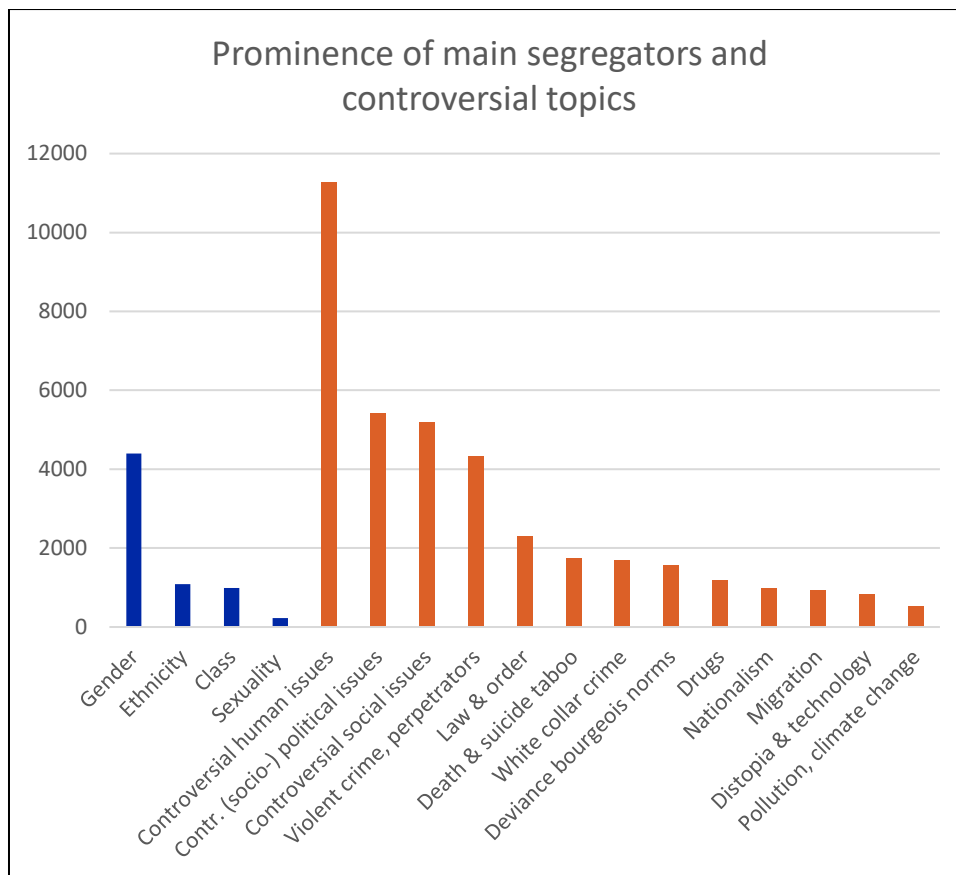


Human issues are emotionally engaging but are not controversial or societally relevant and may include themes like love, hate, life, death, ageing, etc., depicted without any contextual (social) influences, as in, for example, most romantic comedies.

Controversial topics are the most prominent 'societally relevant' category in the data and are discussed in scholarly works as well. Controversial human topics are human dilemmas on which the public opinion varies, e.g., the treatment of the elderly in Western countries, or extramarital affairs ('immoral' to groups in society). Controversial social issues are e.g., inequality, unemployment, exploitation of workers, homelessness, etc. Controversial socio-political issues are social issues combined with (positively or negatively) depicted solution attempts, e.g., actions by the involved parties, or policies by authorities. Besides these grouped categories, prominent in the data are: crime, law and order, suicide, drugs, nationality, immigration, and environmental issues.

The categories cultural proximity, realism, and portrayal of politics follow controversial topics in salience. Cultural proximity of content and target audience is regarded as societally relevant, by a share of the respondents in, mainly, smaller markets like Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland. It is less of a topic (and success factor) in the bigger markets (the UK and Germany) and does not emerge in the (predominantly US) literature. Realism is, albeit in varying interpretations, societally relevant in the literature and in the data. Portrayals of politics and politicians are societally relevant to the respondents and are a topic of scientific works. The main social segregators are very prominent in the literature, whereby gender (women) and ethnicity are most intensely discussed. In the data, gender is a prominent issue, long before ethnicity (which pertains here mainly to darker-skinned immigrants and refugees), and class. Deery and Press (2018) point out that class matters are of importance in media production. The interviewees surveyed for this investigation are deafeningly silent about their own class background, as well as about the depiction of lower classes in their products. Hesmondhalgh (2018) investigates the causes of the under- and misrepresentation of lower/working-classes in media content. Most creators sampled for this study (seem to) have educated middle and upper-class backgrounds, whereby none of them can be regarded as (very) wealthy. Some indicate to be closer to the precariat due to gaps in employment. Sexuality is not a prominent topic; one respondent regards its portrayal as a success factor.

Figure 27. Prominence of main segregators and various controversial topics in number of words



n=44'611 words in statements assigned to topics

The creators' perception of societal relevance and its contribution to success of series is in the following summarized and discussed by country. Canada is represented by one respondent. The results were reported in subchapter 11.3.

### Switzerland

The proximity of TV series to their national and local audience, although for some not necessarily 'societally relevant,' is the most important success factor for series, is the common opinion. Any social topics must be directly about the target audience, must be 'Swiss,' to contribute to success. Cultural proximity of TV series and original target audience did not emerge in the literature.

Five respondents do not think at all that the inclusion of social and socio-political issues is important for audience success, the others feel it might add 'something' as is shown by much admired foreign series. Most interviewees do acknowledge, however, that discussing people's current issues or long-term problems can improve the identification, the involvement with characters in a series, and thus the audience appeal.

Regarding the main social segregators (gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity/nationality), some focus lies on to the latter two. The absence of any discourse on gender issues in the discussed Swiss TV series is a remarkable omission.

Controversial topics are worthy of treatment to some respondents but are not relatable to success.

### **Scandinavia**

Socio-political or -cultural issues are essential to TV series according to most Scandinavian interviewees. Observation and criticism of societal problems is a tradition in Swedish and Danish fiction and is by some traced back to the socio-political-cultural atmosphere since the Second World War. The interviewees emphasize the incorporation of a second main multi-episodic plot in TV series. Discussing current 'hot' issues and/or long-term social phenomena relevant to the home audience is essential, claim many creators. Accordingly, PSBs in these countries demand reflection on the domestic society in TV series. In this way, societal relevance contributes strongly to the success of creators, in the sense of having projects consented to. Many creators also link the discussion of social issues to the involvement of the audience. The findings confirm the work by Redvall (2013).

The creators discuss a broad range of societally relevant topics that are embarked upon in their TV series. Societal relevance can emerge through realistic portrayals, several respondents claim. Realism is also a success factor to most interviewees. A minority believes more in other ways of storytelling. The Scandinavian interviewees are, out of all in the sample, most convinced of the contribution of societal relevance to the success of series: social issues and topics, observations, realism and socio-political critique are all to a large extent important. Only few creators shed some doubt about the causality of societal relevance and realism for (some form of) success.

The Danish PSB DR leaves a big mark in the sample of interviewees. To be commissioned by Swedish and Danish PSBs, the incorporation of societal issues in series is a requirement. Pertaining to DR, the findings of Redvall (2013) are on the one hand confirmed, but on the other also contradicted in some interviewees' criticism. The ad-based broadcasters are much more prudent about the inclusion of potential audience-alienating topics in TV series. Some of the respondents ascribe to the ad-based networks the mediation of decent and human societal values and a different interpretation of what societal relevance can entail. The few interviewees that have experience in production for pay-TV see no inclination towards social issues in TV series emerging. The freedom of expression is regarded as significant at pay-TV. Thus, incorporation of societally relevant content depends on the creators.

### **The UK**

The interviewees underline human emotions and dilemmas as the most essential content of TV series. The respondents name several societally relevant topics. They discuss them for the most part in abstract and unspecific terms. Some topics reflect the critical public discourse on the current situations in the British society: class divisions, poverty, income disparity, abuse and violence. Two respondents do not see much value in social commentary in the entertainment format of TV series.

Realism is societally relevant but is interpreted diversely by the interviewees. One respondent feels that realism is in fact inexistent and states the need for (an illusion of) authenticity in the strife for audience engagement.

Pertaining to the contribution to success of societal relevance, the interviewees vary strongly in their assessments. If at all, discussing domestic social issues is an audience success factor, the respondents feel. Societal relevance is an important success factor for convincing specific broadcasters to commission a series for one of their channels. Alternatively, a strong dose of social commentary might drive broadcasters away from a product. To some, addressing social issues is difficult and counterproductive for success.

The audience's taste is volatile but, three respondents think, a varied offer of TV series has the best chances of success: the demand for challenging relevant contents as well as for unobtrusive entertainment ideally needs to be fulfilled.

The business models of the commissioning broadcasters are not accredited with a strong influence on the inclusion of societal relevance. The difference between mainstream channels and niche audience channels is of higher significance. None of the interviewees have direct experiences with pay-TV. Along functions/roles in the industry (writers vs. experts) no distinctions emerge; personal opinions determine the answers.

### **Germany**

The three respondents agree on realistic social and political issues as societal relevant content of series. In addition, socio-cultural topics may evoke public debate and legal questions are relevant. No respondent feels that societal relevance is the most important success factor, but it enhances audience involvement and recipients' involvement, if done well. It can also entice (social) media coverage and facilitate the marketing of the series. For one respondent, the recipients need to be engaged before being asked to process complex and controversial topics. Domestic issues resound among the recipients more so than foreign ones. Regarding the width of cultural proximity, however, references to very specific small areas are of a too restrictive appeal and might alienate viewers.

All respondents emphasize realism and authenticity of feelings and dilemmas as an important factor in identification and involvement and thus in potential audience success. German realistic storytelling can function well on the global TV market.

Regarding business models, two respondents lament the policies of the PSBs and the ad-based channels. Manifold constraints are mentioned. The third respondent lauds the freedom he experienced in creating a series that turned out not to be a very good match with the ad-based channel's core audience.

### **Italy**

In Italy, societally relevant content of TV series is, to an extent, an important and contentious subject. The issues portrayed in TV series are discussed, whereby the definition of what is societally relevant is broader and less defined than in other countries. Of the main segregators, the focus lies on ethnicity/nationality (migrants, Italian culture and history), gender roles (the fate of women), social class, poverty

and inequality. Crime and violence are often discussed topics, and opinions vary strongly on the depiction of Mafia-type organizations: some respondents find the topic over-exploited and boring, others say the Mafia is still a taboo and potentially a dangerous subject, as the case of the writer of the novel *Gomorrha* indicates<sup>9</sup>.

The emergence of societally relevant issues in Italian TV series, is, as in other countries, also limited by self-censorship on the part of creators, who perceive an abundance of restrictions in the ideologically dominated and volatile Italian TV landscape. The catering to the perceived politics of potential client organizations and their decision-makers emerges as a form of anticipatory obedience that seems very strong among the Italian respondents.

Once more, regarding any contribution to success of TV series, 'universal' wide-ranging human issues stand out as essential in the eyes of the respondents. Societal relevance (social and socio-political issues, politics) contributes on occasion to the success of creators (i.e. the selling of scripts to broadcasters) but leads by itself not to audience success. Realism (of crime, violence, corruption, poverty), is the more common opinion, contributes to audience success to an extent, also because of the novelty effect caused by the departure from idealized edifying portrayals in fiction.

### **Belgium and the Netherlands**

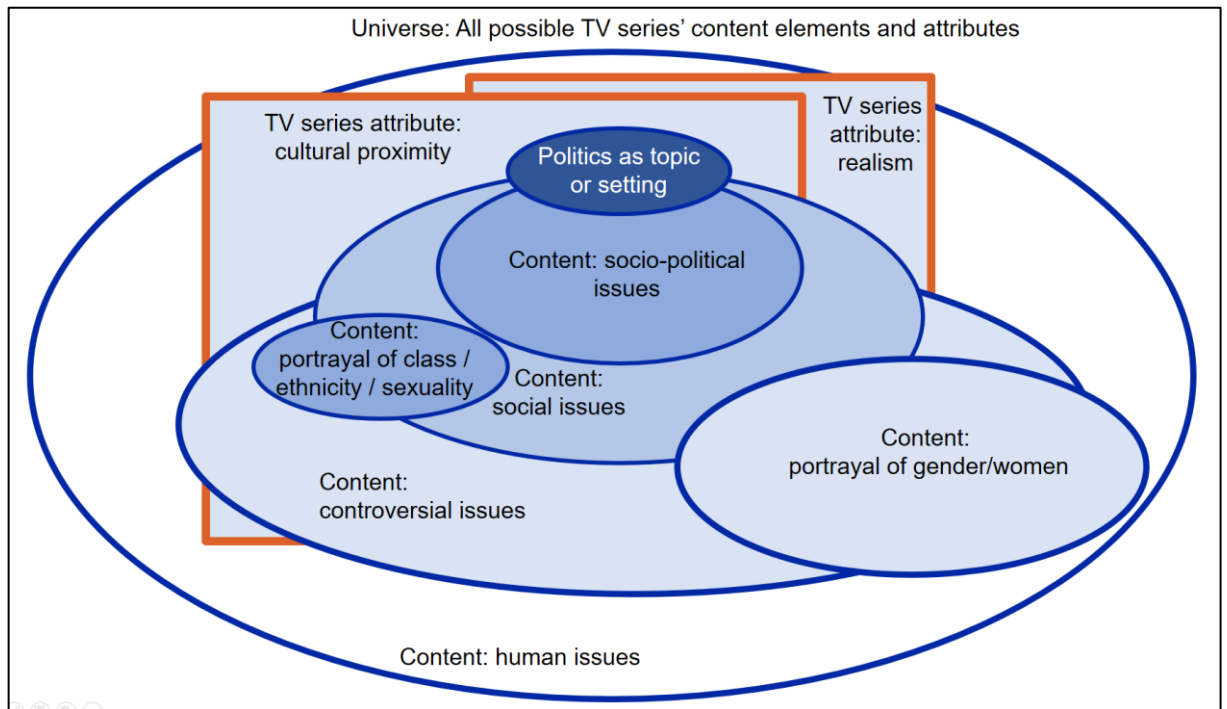
Although not very strongly specified or expressed in detail, societally relevant content of TV fiction is of acknowledged importance to the respondents, primarily in relation to the mandate and responsibilities of the PSBs in The Netherlands and Belgium. Advertising-based TV is perceived as averse to so-called difficult topics in Holland, indicating that it is not an audience success factor. The dissemination and discussion of Flemish culture, and an accentuated inclusive Flemish identity is a regional success factor in Flanders.

### **Overview: Perception of Societal Relevance as a Success Factor**

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<sup>9</sup> The author Roberto Saviano is under constant police protection, which the new (extreme right-wing) minister of the interior is threatening to cancel, as a reaction to Saviano publicly criticizing his policies.

Figure 28. Societally relevant elements of TV series and their contribution to success



In Figure 28, the attributes of TV series regarded as societally relevant are categorized under the headings realism and cultural proximity. The content elements controversial human issues, social or societal issues, socio-political issue and politics as topic or setting are all regarded as societally relevant. The form of the figure indicates the distinction between attributes (squares) and content (eclipses) of TV series. The shade of blue indicates the extent to which the element or attribute is seen as societally relevant, e.g., politics, socio-political issues and portrayals of class, ethnicity and sexuality are regarded as more societally relevant than the other depicted elements: the shades of blue are darker. Human issues are in a white eclipse and are thus not regarded as societally relevant by the respondents.

The contribution to success by the elements is indicated on an ordinal scale by the size of the eclipses and the squares. For example, the portrayal of politics hardly contributes to success (small eclipse), while human issues (large eclipse) contribute very strongly to success of TV series; cultural proximity contributes substantially to success (large square) and does this somewhat more than the other prominent attribute realism (slightly smaller square).

### 13.5. Ideal Types of Creators

Four typologies of media workers (by Burns, Cantor, Wyss and Keel, von Rimscha and Siegert) are briefly presented in subchapter 3.8. In this section the core of the six ideal types distilled from the data of the present study is summarized. In addition, the discerned ideal types are compared with a) the types of journalists of

Wyss and Keel (2010), b) types of BBC communication professionals of Burns, c) types of TV network film producers of Cantor (both as rendered by McQuail (2010)), and d) the types of entertainment media workers of von Rimscha and Siegert (2011). The prominence of the ideal types is compared across business models, functions and countries.

### **The Audience Servant**

The audience servant makes a strong connection between understanding the audience, tailor-made qualities and contents of TV series, and audience success. The latter is not merely indicated by high ratings or market shares, but by a large involvement of the audience evoked by purposely included features of the TV series.

Compared to the typology of Burns (1977) as reported by McQuail (2010, p. 295), the audience servant has similarities with the pragmatic type that aims for an audience resonance satisfactory to the organization. However, the qualitative orientation of the audience servant also points in the direction of the society-influencer type that aims to leave (potentially retrievable) traces at the audience. The audience servant is to some extent aligned with the writer-producer and career producer types of Cantor (McQuail, 2010, p. 302), considering the focus on communicating to audiences and achieving (qualitative) resonance. Pertaining to the journalists' typology of Wyss and Keel (2010, pp. 362-365), the analogy lies mostly with the seller, transmitter and mediator types. The audience servant ideal type matches mostly the professional orientation discerned by von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, pp. 1009, 1020-1022) and entails the producer types of the creatives and the veterans, and the commissioner type of the editor-producer.

To this ideal type, the audience has the largest influence on the content of TV series. The individual creator aims to fulfill the audience demands with suitable content. Catering to the construct audience enables certain messages whilst constraining others. Where the broadcaster and/or the production team are credible proxies for the audience needs in the eyes of the audience servant, the organization and the team are granted strong influence. Specific societally relevant content elements like cultural proximity, local references, realism and authenticity of issues can be part of the perceived audience preferences. These are then integrated in the TV series and are thought to contribute to success.

### **The Crafter**

The creation of 'good' TV series is the core task of the ideal type of the crafter. What constitutes quality and how it is achieved are the main concerns. Not surprisingly in view of the wide range and depth of elements to elaborate upon, the type is the most salient in the data. The dominance of the ideal type demonstrates the priorities the respondents set in their work.

The type is similar to the craft-oriented type as discerned by Burns in 1977 and described by McQuail (2010, p. 295) that aims for task- and product-intrinsic satisfaction. According to McQuail, Burns' craft-oriented type is entirely focused on the task and the product, and gratification is achieved when peers and informed stakeholders appreciate the outcome of a well-done job. The crafter is, to some extent, in accordance with all film producer types of Cantor (McQuail, 2010, p. 302)

regarding his focus on process and task integrity and intrinsic product quality. Regarding the journalists' typology of Wyss and Keel (2010, pp. 362-365), the researcher, transmitter, analyst, and stylist types share common ground with the crafter. The crafter fits the creative orientation of von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, pp. 1009, 1020-1022), the producer types of the creatives, and the commissioner type of the editor-producer.

Regarding TV series, the crafter has similarities with the ideal type of the artist in that the gratification stems from production and product. However, in contrast to the artist, the crafter does not aim to produce 'art' but a recognizably excellent outcome of finely tuned processes and extensive professional competence.

Influences on content are to the crafter admissible from within the highly skilled creation team and on occasion from competent and knowledgeable developers, supervisors or clients. A lack of resonance among broadcasters/distributors and audiences (important to the types of the audience servant, the paymaster servant and the salesperson) does not per se signify a lack of success.

The evidence for this type consists firstly of storytellers retelling the story of their series: plots, story arches, characters, motivation, and the reasoning behind all elements. The crafter includes societally relevance in the series if the story demands it, but the emphasis lies with elaboration on universal human issues and characters as the core of storytelling. This consideration distinguishes the crafter from the ideal type of the messenger, whose goal is impacting the public arena with messages of a more socio-political nature.

Secondly, the evidence for the ideal type of the crafter consists of descriptions of the development, production and distribution process. The nature of 'good' team processes can lead to integration of societally relevant messages.

### **The Salesperson**

The salesperson aims for quantitative success. The quality in a product is the element that rakes in the numbers of viewers. It is irrelevant how, and with what, success is achieved. Numbers of viewers or market shares are the one criterion.

Regarding attractiveness of broadcasters to the salesperson, the size of the potential audience is the standard. The salesperson has no objections to compromise if the audience is enlarged by it. The content and features of the TV series are only of interest with respect to drawing in (more) viewers for the channel, and, thus, in many cases, to increasing the advertising revenues. Catering to the largest possible audience enables a few unchallenging messages and constrains a wide variety of elements that are perceived as (possibly) chasing viewers away.

The salesperson is congruent with the pragmatic type of Burns (McQuail, 2010, p. 295) that aims for ratings that satisfy the organization. The salesperson is most strongly aligned with the career producer (commercial goal orientation) and filmmaker (career and remuneration orientation) types of Cantor (McQuail, 2010, p. 302) who do not have conflicts with the broadcaster. Pertaining to the journalists' typology of Wyss and Keel (2010, pp. 362-365), the analogy is confined to the seller. The salesperson displays entirely the market orientation of von Rimscha and Siegert



(2011, pp. 1009, 1020-1022) and matches the producer types of the marketer and the commissioner type of the program buyer. The latter type is, as its label implies, in von Rimscha and Siegert (2011) confined to procurement of program, but the characteristics fit the here discerned salesperson ideal type of creators.

### **The Messenger**

The messenger does not develop and sell a product but articulates ideas and opinions about the world with the ambition to change it for the better. The messenger evokes associations with strategic communication and propaganda. The function of a TV series is that of a troubadour in the middle ages: important messages on the state of the world wrapped in a song and a dance. The messenger has most in common with the society-influencer type of Burns as listed by McQuail (2010, p. 295). The messenger ideal type matches the writer-producer type of Cantor (McQuail, 2010, p. 302) fully with his goal of mediating important messages. Regarding the journalists' typology of Wyss and Keel (2010, pp. 362-365), the messenger has most in common with the partisan and advocate types and, to a degree, with the detective and provocateur types. The common welfare orientation (von Rimscha and Siegert, 2011, pp. 1009, 1020-1022) is dominant at the messenger ideal type. The match with the producer and commissioner types is not so perfect but the veterans are close to the messenger because of the inclination towards mediation. The same holds true for the commissioner type of the editor-producer.

The highest form of success would be to leave a sustained influence on the audience and by extension on society in the direction intended by the creator. More realistic goals can be arousing public debate, impacting agenda setting, influencing opinion leaders, and getting feedback from decision-makers in the public domain. Some legendary creators fulfil the characteristics of the ideal type of the messenger to a larger degree: the creators of *The Wire*, David Simon and Ed Burns, with their attempts to influence the public debate on the social reality in US cities and Matthew Weiner's efforts to kick start reflection on current gender roles by portraying the mores of the 50s and 60s in *Mad Men*. According to Sepinwall (2012), David Chase (*The Sopranos*) has never seen characters behaving like human beings in TV series and put himself to that task.

The messenger ideal type tolerates influences of stakeholders on the content but does not compromise on the core messages of the TV series. The nature of the ideal type logically enables the creator's key messages and constrains the ones that are not congruent with the creator's opinion. The size of the audience is of importance, but no concessions are made on the essential communications of the product.

Broadcasters are there to amplify the messages as strong as possible. Many facets of the development and production of TV series are negotiable; the key messages are not to be diluted. Societal relevance is the core of the messenger's mission.

### **The Paymaster Servant**

The paymaster servant is oriented towards the broadcaster and is fully informed about the character, the mandate, and the requirements of the organization. The type has similarities with the organization-oriented type of Burns (1977). It aims

to achieve the (internally assessed) goals of the organization (McQuail, 2010, p. 295). The paymaster servant type, with his focus on achieving the targeted goals of the organization, is to a degree congruent with the career producer (organization goals) and filmmaker (remuneration and career orientation) types of Cantor (McQuail, 2010, p. 302). Of the journalists' typology of Wyss and Keel (2010, pp. 362-365), the seller (to the broadcaster) and neutral transmitter types are closest to the paymaster servant. The paymaster servant blends the orientations of von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, pp. 1009, 1020-1022) but is mostly geared towards professionalism, and matches somewhat the producer types of the creatives and veterans and the commissioner type of the editor-producer.

The paymaster servant is familiar with the intricacies of the decision-making at the broadcaster and prevents conflicts. The audience and its idiosyncrasies exercise influence on the series only by proxy: the broadcaster speaks for the audience and the formulated demands stemming from the broadcaster's construct of the audience are not questioned. The paymaster servant completely identifies with the broadcaster and makes its values and goals his/her own. Success of the TV series is achieved for the ideal type if the paymaster is satisfied. The broadcaster can base the assessment of success on audience size or market shares growth, profits, reputational gains, or on complementing its program.

The broadcaster (or production company) has the strongest influence on the content of TV series. In the data, catering to the broadcaster enables certain societally relevant elements, whilst omitting the ones not deemed suitable by the organization for its audience. Varying by broadcaster, specific societally relevant content elements like the gender roles, migration, identity, politics and democracy, history, community, realism as well as human issues, escapism and fantasy are integrated to fulfill the demands. To the creator, the required elements contribute to success in the sense of realizing a TV series.

### **The Artist**

TV series are expression to the artist. Another label for the ideal type is the 'Auteur', as first used pertaining to the French new wave in cinema. Famous US showrunners are often accolated with this 'Auteur' status. Sepinwall (2012, p. 70) says that *The Sopranos* showrunner "Chase never worried about having a likeable character, or even series, and he didn't care about giving the audience what they wanted", and "he was fighting against the notion that a TV series had to have a likeable character at its center. Chase set out to write a show about his troubled relationship with his late mother."

The integrity of the production process and the cultural value of the series are main priorities of the ideal type. The artist should not be encumbered by any external influences. The ideal type of the artist has similarity with the craft-oriented type of Burns (McQuail, 2010, p. 295) that targets task- and product-intrinsic satisfaction and with the society-influencer type that targets leaving a mark in the public (cultural) domain. The high art variation of cultural goals of the artist distance the type from the crafter. The artist strives for the gratification of creating an acknowledged work of art and aims for recognition from peers and opinion leaders in the cultural

domain. The type distinguishes itself from the messenger type, because the expression per se is of importance, whereas the pursuit of social, political, and ideological goals is not. Commercial and remuneration aims are demonstratively ignored. The artist type, with his focal points of artistic quality, freedom of creation and independent process execution is congruent to the writer-producer (product focus) and filmmaker (status attainment in trade/art) types of Cantor (McQuail, 2010, p. 302). Pertaining to the journalist types of Wyss and Keel (2010, pp. 362-365), the stylist and provocateur types are closest to the artist. The artist clearly displays the creative orientation of von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, pp. 1009, 1020-1022) is very congruent with the producer type of the creatives and is somewhat in line with the commissioner type of the editor-producer.

The audience can, or must be, edified to engage with the valuable TV series. Von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, p. 1013) refer to work by Tunstall from 1993 and Costera Meijer from 2010 and point at an artistic orientation and a patronizing attitude towards the audience of (quality) entertainment producers. In the same vein, broadcasters are only of importance for enabling access to content. All influence on content exerted by the commissioning client can only have a negative result on the product. Societal relevance can emerge in the eyes of viewers as part of the artistic expression of the creator. The creator, however, acknowledges no intention besides producing highly personal and true art.

#### **Overview: matching of types**

To provide more insight in the features of the ideal types a brief comparison is made in Table 3. The matching of types is based on ascribed features of the types like orientation, perception of function, typical actions, professional and/or personal goals and tolerance for external influence and compromise.

The types of journalists' roles are manifold and match the in the present study discerned ideal types unevenly; ideal types combine features of multiple journalist types and only the type of the salesperson has its equivalent in journalism. Each film producer type can be assigned to several ideal types of creators. More congruent to the distilled ideal types of TV series' creators are the communication professional types of Burns. The orientation types of von Rimscha and Siegert (2011, pp. 1009, 1020-1022) can be applied well, whereby the professional orientation is assignable to the two related types of audience and paymaster servant, and the creative orientation to the artist and the crafter. The common welfare orientation matches the messenger and the market orientation fits the salesperson. The ideal types can be matched to the discerned producer and commissioner types, but the fit is less informative. Most ideal types match the creatives and veterans (producer types) and the editor-producers (commissioner types). Only the salesperson diverges from the pattern (marketer and program buyer are the matching types). Von Rimscha and Siegert (2011) include also non-fiction and procurement entertainment workers. Several types emerge in the cluster analysis of the authors (2011) that do not find a counterpart among creators of fictional TV series.

Table 4. Comparison of types: creators of TV series vs. communication professionals, journalists, film producers, entertainment workers

TV series creators	Communication professionals (Burns in McQuail, 2010)	Journalists (Wyss and Keel, 2010)	Film producers (Cantor in McQuail, 2010)	Entertainment workers (von Rimscha and Siebert, 2011)	
				Orientation	Producer (Pr) / commissioner (Co) type
Audience Servant	Pragmatic type, society-influencer (qualitative audience resonance)	Seller (to audience), Transmitter, Mediator	Writer-producer, Career producer	Professional	Pr: Creatives, Veterans. Co: Editor-producers
Crafter	Craft-oriented type	Researcher, Transmitter, Analyst, Stylist	Writer-producer, Filmmaker, Career producer	Creative	Pr: Creatives Co: Editor-producers
Salesperson	Pragmatic type	Seller (to any buyer)	Career producer, Filmmaker	Market	Pr: Marketer Co: Program buyer
Messenger	Society-influencer (socio-political public resonance)	Partisan, Advocate, Detective, Provocateur	Writer-producer	Common welfare	Pr: Veterans Co: Editor-producers
Paymaster Servant	Organization-oriented type	Seller (to broadcaster), Transmitter	Career producer, Filmmaker	Professional	Pr: Creatives, Veterans. Co: Editor-producers
Artist	Craft-oriented type, society-influencer (cultural domain resonance)	Stylist, Provocateur	Writer-producer, Filmmaker	Creative	Pr: Creatives Co: Editor-producers

### Ideal types by business model of broadcaster

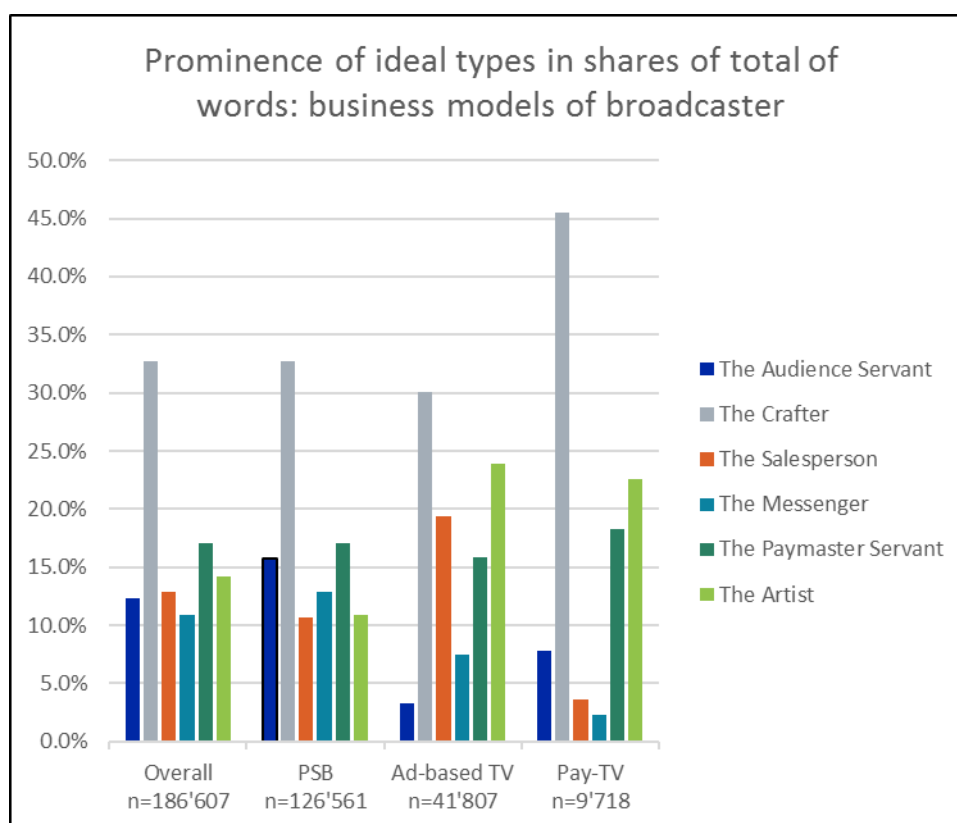
The highest number of statements assignable to ideal types stem from the group of respondents employed or commissioned by PSBs. It follows that, regarding the distribution in shares over the six relevant ideal types, the PSB business model is most evenly spread and resembles most the overall picture. The most salient types are the crafter, the paymaster servant and the audience servant. The messenger is fourth in terms of prominence among PSB respondents. Compared to the overall distribution, the salesperson and the artist are underrepresented. On the other hand, the audience servant and the messenger are more salient than in the overall pattern.

The integrity and the quality of the TV series are valued to an average extent. The audience and the organization are very important for the PSB respondents. The mandate of the organizations surfaces in the relative prominence of the messenger. Commercial goals are not prioritized, neither is the artistic value of the product.

The statements from respondents working for ad-based broadcasters are less numerous. The crafter is most salient but is less present than in the overall distribution of ideal types. The artist and the salesperson types are prominent and are strongly overrepresented, while the other types lag far behind. The audience servant and the messenger are conspicuously spurious. The artistic value of the product is of importance, but so is the commercial side of the matter. The quality of the product translates (with some regularity) into high ratings and sales. However, the salience of the ideal types also shows the two sides of the often-discussed collisions at ad-based broadcasters about TV series: interference is said to constrain the freedom of expression and the quality of the series. The contentious arguments surrounding the preferences of targeted audiences leaves a mark also in the absence of the audience servant.

The statements from the interviewees working within the business model of pay-TV are the least numerous. The crafter is strongly overrepresented which indicates that the focus is predominantly on the product itself at the few pay-TV respondents. The artist and the paymaster servant are also salient. The other types are almost absent. The distribution of ideal types indicates that the pay-TV organization (i.e. mostly Netflix) is a valued and influential client, that the pay-TV channels are perceived as respectful of the integrity of products, that the audience size and composition are a black box, and that the emphasis in creation of the series is on genre and enthralling content, but not on messages.

Figure 29. Prominence of ideal types in shares of total number of words: business model of the broadcaster of the TV series



### Ideal Types by Roles/Functions

In this comparison of ideal types along the different roles and functions pertaining to TV series, the highest number of words in statements assigned to the ideal types stems from writers. The crafter is the most salient and is strongly overrepresented. The artist is the next most salient type and is also overrepresented. The third type is the averagely salient paymaster servant. The slightly underrepresented salesperson ranks fourth. Thus, the product and its quality, artistic achievement and integrity of the actual content of the series is of highest importance, and the broadcaster is the dominant enabling or constraining, and potentially contentious gatekeeper standing between the writer and the audience. Messages can be included but are not a priority for all. The audience servant and the messenger are (strongly) underrepresented.

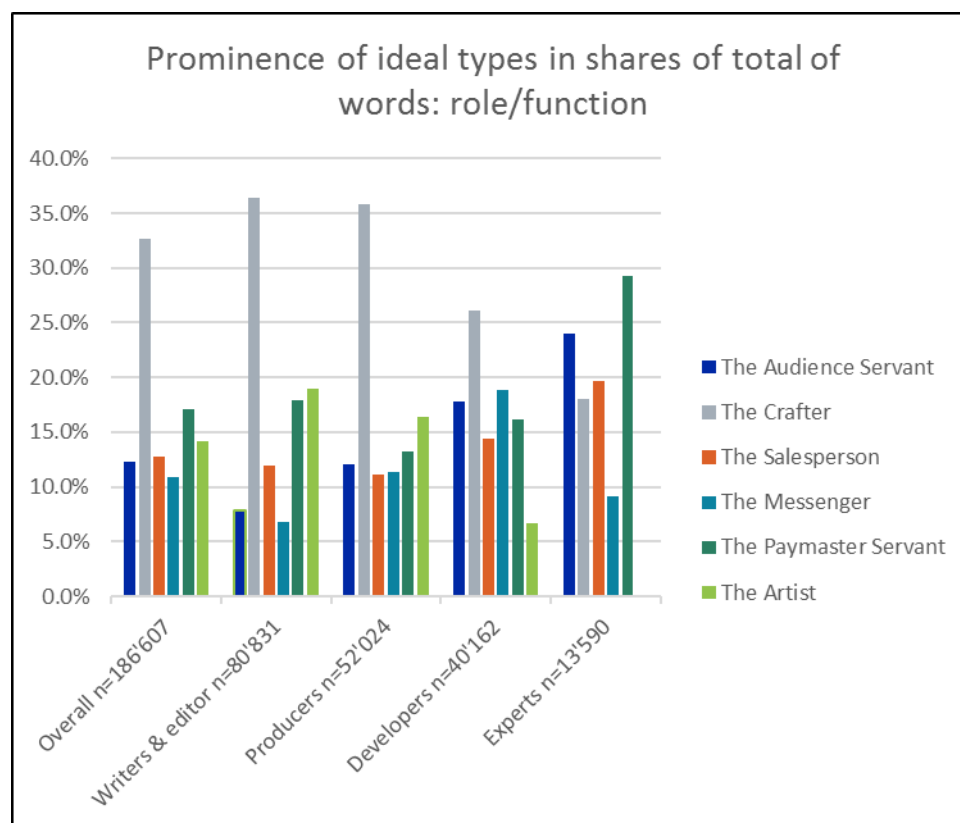
The producers rank second in output of words assigned to the ideal types. The crafter is most salient and is overrepresented. The other five ideal types are, on the producer-function, more evenly spread than on the other roles. The salesperson and the artist are most salient and are overrepresented, the paymaster servant type ranks fourth and is underrepresented compared to the overall scores. Creation and the quality of process and product are slightly more emphasized than the 'professional' side of the task. On this side, ratings are important, but the client organization, audience and messages are not neglected. This balanced picture in the distribution of

ideal types reflects the role of respondents who often take on project supervising roles and must concern themselves with a variety of facets of TV series and appease all stakeholders whilst protecting the final product.

In the words of developers, the crafter is most salient but is underrepresented compared to the overall distribution. The next most salient types are the audience servant and the paymaster-servant. The audience is the client of the developer and the type is overrepresented in comparison to the overall scores. Ratings are important, the salesperson type comes in third. All developers stand in the service of PSBs, hence the overrepresentation of the messenger type: the mandates of PSBs include entertainment with relevant elements. The developers attach little weight to the 'auteur' facet. The influence of the developer collides most strongly with the stubbornly independent artist type of creators.

The sample consists of few experts. The artist ideal type is inexistent in their statements. The experts are not directly involved in creation and have little patience for artistic consideration in the business. Strongly overrepresented are the paymaster servant type, the audience servant and the salesperson. This distribution reflects the job description of the experts rather well: the features of the broadcasters and the audiences, as well as the measurable resonance on the market are all matters of deliberation. Messages are to one expert of importance.

*Figure 30. Prominence of ideal types in shares of total number of words: role/function of respondent*



### **Ideal Types by Country**

As stated above, similarities within countries in this data highlight the influences exercised by national TV series production cultures on the perceptions and activities of the creators and experts. However, the samples of the countries vary in size and composition, which constrains inferences and generalizations. The Swiss and Scandinavian samples are the largest, but in the former no writers, and in the latter hardly any developers are included. The British sample consists of a large share of experts, but no developers. The German sample is small and does not include developers. The Belgian-Dutch sample entails two developers and two producers who on occasion also write. The Canadian sample consists of merely one respondent and is removed for this quantitative-qualitative description. Nevertheless, some tendencies are still worthy of being outlined.

In the words of Scandinavian respondents, the crafter is most salient and overrepresented. The next most salient ideal types are the averagely salient paymaster servant and the strongly overrepresented messenger. The many producers and writers are focused on their product that is seen as displaying craftsmanship and is ascribed societal as well as cultural value. To a lesser extent it is regarded as a commodity. Many creators attach high value to the mediation in their TV series and often cooperate closely and harmoniously with the broadcaster. Many aim for very large, mainstream (DR, SVT, TV 2, TV3) and/or nondescript (ditto, and Netflix) audiences: the audience servant is underrepresented.

The crafter, the audience servant and the paymaster servant are most salient in the words of the Swiss interviewees. The latter two types are (strongly) overrepresented. The respondents work on a series that became a runaway audience hit and many observations pertain to the successful correlation of content elements and audience preferences. Many are in the service of the PSB and reason accordingly. The other types are underrepresented compared to the overall pattern. The artist and the messenger types are of marginal prominence, indicating the lack of value attached by many of the Swiss respondents to the cultural, expressive and mediation facets of the entertainment product. The marginalization of the two types is, however, also due to the scarcity of practicing writers in the sample.

The most salient and overrepresented ideal types for the Italian sample are the crafter before the paymaster servant and the messenger. The latter scores highest among the Italian respondents. The discussion evolves (also) around messages that are – for various reasons – not included. In general, the focus is strongly on the activity of writing, the product itself and the content. The broadcasters and production companies are assigned strong enabling but also constraining influences. The large differences between audiences of the main broadcasters and their channels are perceived by many creators. TV series are seldom seen as a commodity or an art product.

In the German sample, the crafter is most salient, but the ideal types of the artist and the salesperson stand out. The former is strongly overrepresented. A conservative TV landscape unfavorable to well-crafted and culturally valuable TV

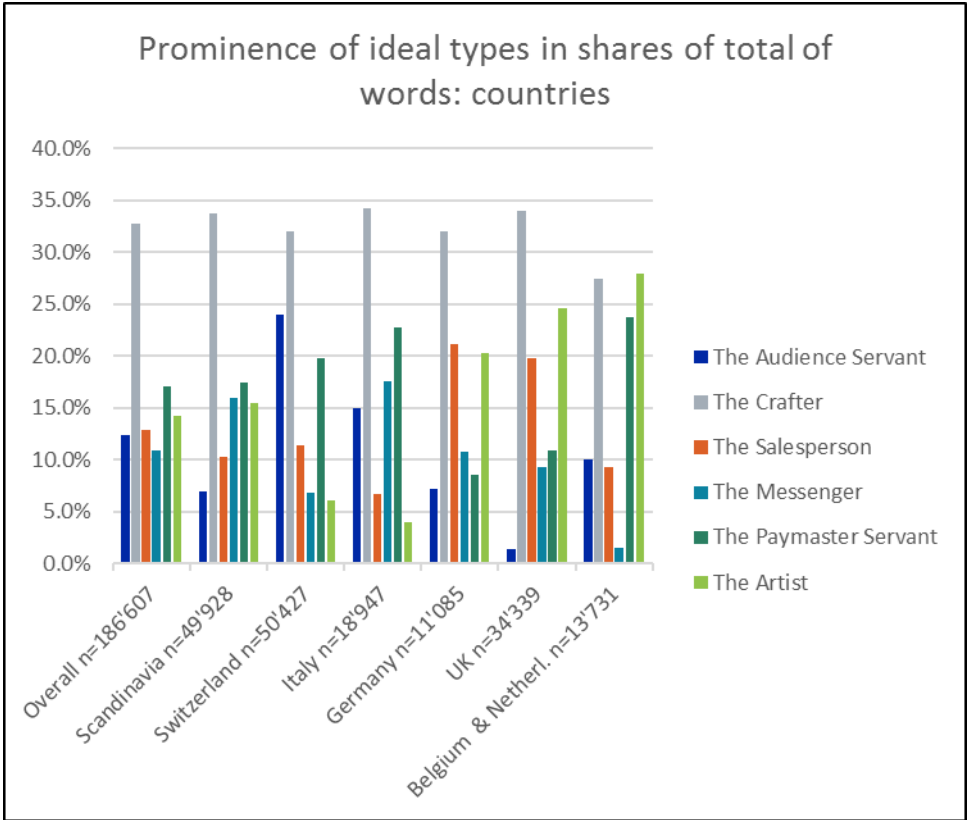


series is an important topic. So are the market shares of products. The sample is domineered by respondents working for ad-based broadcasters and the cooperation is lauded as well as criticized. The PSBs do not shine in the perception of the interviewees either. In defiance of broadcasters' considerations, the influences of the (construct) audience are less salient.

The words of the British interviewees are assigned most to the slightly overrepresented crafter, and to the strongly overrepresented ideal types of the artist and the salesperson. The writers discuss in great length the TV series, its content and the value of expression in TV series. The salesperson is overrepresented, the experts and one writer have many considerations on the market resonance. The personal expression in TV series by writers can evoke specific persuasive messages to some respondents, but the messenger type is underrepresented. The paymaster servant is marginalized, few distinctions are made along the character of broadcasters. The TV audience considerations are also of modest influence to the writers and are often (for artistic or unfamiliarity reasons) ignored.

The Belgian-Dutch words in statements are, besides the omnipresent crafter, mostly assigned to the artist and paymaster servant ideal types. The process of creation, the TV series and its content are thus prioritized. In addition, the producers express themselves mostly along the lines of the artist and the PSB cadre along the paymaster servant ideal type. Broadcasters yield a great influence in the production landscape (mandate, policies, and character differences), as not only the broadcaster's employees but also the producers confirm. Personal expression in TV series is valued. Messages are not highly emphasized or specified and are routinely assigned relevance in relation to the PSBs' mandate. The audience is with some regularity regarded from an edification perspective. The audience influence is of modest strength, the broadcaster is its proxy.

Figure 31. Prominence of ideal types in shares of total number of words in statements assigned to the six types: country of production/domicile of respondent



n=178'457 words in statements assigned to six ideal types (Beraud is the single Canadian respondent and is excluded in a comparison by country).

## 14. Conclusions

In this final chapter, I formulate the conclusions. Each of the key findings is briefly corroborated by combining the results of the four topical realms analyzed in this study: the creators' perception of influences on content, of societal relevance and its contribution to success, and of success factors of TV series. The discerned ideal types of creators serve to inform, substantiate and/or illustrate the findings.

To recapitulate, the research questions are:

*RQ 1A: Which constraining and/or enabling influences do creators of TV series perceive on creative work and mediation of messages?*

*RQ 1B: How do the perceived constraining and/or enabling influences compare for extent of impact on creative work and mediation of messages?*

*RQ 2: What does societally relevant content entail in the perception of creators of TV series?*

*RQ 3: To what extent is societal relevance perceived by creators as a success factor of TV series?*

### 14.1. Varying Interpretations of Societal Relevance and Success

A preposition to the answer to research question 2 is the notion that societal relevance and success are interpreted in different ways. Several creators interpret societal relevance in their series in hindsight: elements that are perceived to enhance the involvement, identification and/or engagement of recipients are societally relevant. Anything viewers relate to in TV series is (societally) relevant because it taps into an audience (i.e. 'societal') need.

In line with other creators, this study deploys an interpretation that relates societal relevance to content and messages in TV series. The categories of topics and attributes that emerge in the data are (universal) human dilemmas and issues, controversial human issues, social issues, socio-political issues, politics as topic or setting of series, realism, and cultural proximity. Of these, human dilemmas, cultural proximity and realism are not always labelled as societally relevant. The categories are neither distinct nor equally wide: in the interviews, the topics are often blended. Cultural proximity and realism entail content elements (e.g., recognizable Swiss locations, characters, stars, events, dialects,) but consist mostly of perceived attributes of TV series ('Swiss' atmosphere and tempo, storytelling credible to the Swiss).

Success is interpreted in various (intertwined) ways. Realization and then prolongation of a TV series (and employment, remuneration) is, like all other forms of success, to an extent important for all ideal types of creators but is most significant to the crafter. Attracting large audiences is most important to the salesperson and the paymaster servant types. Evoking audience involvement is imperative to the audience servant and to an extent to the paymaster servant. Selling or licensing of TV series is mostly valued by the salesperson. Achieving resonance and effects like impacting the public debate, triggering reviews and media coverage, and receiving

awards are relevant most to the messenger and the artist. Another form of success entails reputation and status enhancement at peers (to the artist most important) and broadcasters (important to the paymaster servant) of the creators and other parties involved in the realization of the TV series.

## **14.2. Societal Relevance: Conditional Success Factor of TV Series**

To answer the research question (3) that provides this study with its title: societal relevance is a success factor of TV series. This affirmative answer, however, needs to be refined and curtailed.

The inclusion of societally relevant content is a factor in achieving the realization of a proposed TV series. Many of the PSBs discussed in the data are at least inclined to greenlight series with societally relevant content. The Scandinavian PSBs require some form of reflection on society in one of the main story arches. A constraint is that the mainstream audience is not be driven away. The PSB developers in Switzerland, Belgium, Italy and Canada express an ambition to tackle (domestic) societally relevant topics, and creators claim that German, Dutch and British PSBs are interested too. Several TV series substantiate this claim. In Italy, the PSB also insists on societal relevance whereby the interpretation ranges from hagiographies to fantasy with mermaids. In contrast to Scandinavia, societal relevance is not a hard requirement for greenlighting in the other countries. The main reason on part of broadcasters for integrating societal relevance is rooted in the fulfilment of the PSBs' mandate and the ambition to offer a pluralistic multi-facetted program. The messenger ideal type is strongest at the developers. Even if writers do not display the characteristics of the messenger ideal type very often, the strength of the paymaster servant type indicates that the broadcasters' demands (including societal relevance) are often fulfilled by writers and producers. Regarding specific (radical) messages, though, PSBs are regularly shown as constraining because of the enforcement of impartiality and neutrality, the mainstream focus, and direct attempts of political interference.

Ad-based broadcasters are seen as reluctant to greenlighting TV series with more critical or controversial societally relevant contents. In Scandinavia, Holland, Germany and Italy, the creators state that ad-based channels do appreciate societal relevance in the shape of e.g., decent values and a sense of community. The British respondents see no difference between PSBs and ad-based TV in greenlighting societally relevant content: other criteria domineer. At the pay-TV broadcasters in the countries there is room for societally relevant content, but it must be integrated in a series that fulfils the scripting, target audience orientation and requirements of the designated genre. The inclusion of societal relevance seems subsequently up to the creators. In dealings with broadcasters of all types, the creators express ex-ante adaption to the broadcasters that deploy diverging, but specific enabling and constraining policies. Mediation is thus strongly steered from the moment

considerations of distribution by broadcasters come into play, which is usually very early in the development process. Pay-TV channels are regarded as enabling creative work, ad-based channels constrain mediation of messages, and PSBs vary in their policies but are largely in the middle between the two. Pay-TV channels serve (several or many) niche audiences. In the same vein, channels targeting non-mainstream audiences like BBC 2 or Channel 4 are regarded as more open to greenlighting societally relevant content, is stated about the UK, and to some extent about other countries like Italy (RAI 2, 3), The Netherlands (niche PSB and small ad-based channels), and Germany (niche PSB channels).

Societal relevance is, by most respondents, not regarded as a (prime) contributor to success amongst a mainstream audience. Out of the categories of societal relevance, cultural proximity, realism and controversial issues are most likely to trigger identification and involvement of recipients. Social issues and politics are of a more selective appeal. Scandinavian respondents see societal relevance drawing in the audience, the Swiss strongly do not believe so and respondents from other countries have by and large some faith in societal relevance as an audience success factor. Societal relevance can evoke strong engagement of specific smaller groups of viewers and draw interest of foreign suppliers looking to complement their program and serve niche audiences, creators state.

Audience considerations are very salient and can govern creative work on TV series, content elements and evoke the incorporation of specific messages. The tailoring of content for a targeted audience is a prominent success factor, and so are advertising and positioning of a series on the audience market. For the latter, societally relevant content can be an outstanding feature.

Reputation gains are another form of success that societal relevance might initiate. For all broadcasters, creating a 'calling card' becomes at times a priority. Societal relevance is seen as enhancing the prestige of broadcasters and creators by evoking word-of-mouth, reviews, media coverage and debate. This phenomenon is like Hollywood studios releasing the more serious, 'deep' and perhaps even grown-up films right before the voting on the Oscar awards begins.

### **14.3. Societal Relevance: Ingredient of Paths to Success**

To review, verify and elaborate upon the findings discussed in the previous section I carried out a qualitative comparative analysis (see Appendix for an introduction and detailed results of the deployed analysis). I assigned the scores on the 'outcome' – high audience success – based on the frequency (number of words) and tendency of the statements of the creators. The three experts are not involved in creation and were left out of the analysis. The perceived audience success is the only deployable dependent variable ('outcome' in QCA). The alternative outcome (success in terms of realization of a TV series) has a maximum score in all cases: the series of the creators were all produced and broadcasted. Other success measures (e.g.,

reputation gains) are in principle less relevant and are not in all cases based on (enough) evidence.

In the deployed QCA, in a first step, I analyzed the necessity of the factors for success. Only the factor 'good' content qualified as necessary: whenever a high degree of success is achieved in the eyes of the creators, content is perceived as good.

In a second step, all the potential success factors that are elements of the TV series (content, form and societal relevance) or activities executed on the series (marketing and distribution) were tested for sufficiency. Process-related success factors (organizational facets, leadership, internal processes, environmental orientation, HR) and the resonance factor (external evaluation) would have been included in the sufficiency analysis if they were necessary, but the factors did not qualify as such.

QCA rendered a solution model consisting of four sufficient paths to success. The model explains 70% of the cases with (perceived) high audience success. All paths to success have good content as one of the ingredients. In the first path (A), quality content combines with a high degree of societal relevance; good form and distribution are, however, not required for success in this path. A creator supplying a PSB committed to distribution with a well-made and star-studded, but conventional series shows this path. In QCA, contradictory cases serve to reject the statement of sufficiency for the investigated outcome. One case contradicts this path, but inspection reveals that the audience success of the long-running series is perhaps underrated by a success-accustomed respondent. It follows, that the path is a valid route to success in the sample.

Path B, on the other hand, entails – besides content – good distribution. A high degree of societal relevance is absent, so is good form/design. A creator commissioned by pay-TV shows this route to audience success: good distribution by a new player is perceived as important for the quality storytelling product that doesn't rely on exceptional visuals or production value. The scores of one creator (PSB, crime series) contradict this path. This evokes strong doubts about its sufficiency for success, despite the satisfactory values of the parameters.

Most prominent is path C which consists of good form, high societal relevance in addition to quality content, whereby good marketing is structurally not needed for success. The seven (mainly Scandinavian and some Swiss) creators displaying this path are one developer of tremendously successful series, three crime and thriller writers, two other PSB developers and a producer/supervisor in the service of a PSB. Good marketing is in supplying PSBs not perceived as a factor, but societal relevance has to be included for audience success. By contrast, one writer perceives the factors in the paths as well-executed and can only underrate the audience success because it is compared to the large personal satisfaction that the creator achieved with the realistic drama series.

Finally, the last path (D) consists of good content, form and marketing, whereby distribution is taken for granted (while guaranteed) and societal relevance does not lead to audience success. One creator supplying a PSB with a heavily advertised

crime series with a special look and supposedly high production value, displays this route to success.

In conclusion, the QCA results demonstrate that in the sample of the present study, societal relevance is, on several occasions, perceived as an audience success factor. It is part of the two most prominent sufficient routes to success. It is, however, not necessary for success and not always part of the causal recipe for success. The findings of the QCA fully substantiate and inform further the results of the other analyses.

#### **14.4. Decisive Influences on TV Series**

What enables or constrains societally relevant messages in TV series? The discussed influences on the content of TV series encompass the inclusion of messages regarded as societally relevant. In a brief overview pertaining to research question 1 (A & B), the inclusion of this sort of elements depends to a degree on the opinion and intentions of the main creator(s) and the key creative team. The ideal type of the messenger is not the most prominent but is still surprisingly salient for a classical entertainment format and demonstrates an inclination of creators (foremost developers) to enhance the mediation of messages. Messages can be a side product of the art of the artist ideal type, and of the craft of the very salient crafter type. Societally relevant elements and messages can be incorporated to satisfy the construct audience and/or the broadcaster. One argument to all parties can be the expected contribution of societally relevant content to success of the TV series. Decisive is, then, whether the representatives of the client organization require, encourage, permit or – out of many possible considerations – oppose and prohibit the inclusion of (some of) the societally relevant messages of the creators. With regard to European interviewees, extensive individual influence of a head writer on all facets of TV series is not common. The large influence is confined to the – essential – core business of scripting the story. The representatives of the broadcaster often have final say and veto rights but might refrain from exercising their authority.

The influences on the organizational level of the model of Shoemaker and Reese (2014) are the key to the general outline of series' content (genre, type, overall tonality and mediation), and to the inclusion of any (potentially controversial) societally relevant elements. The realization of costly TV series hinges on funding and thus on the goals, strategy and – as regularly evidenced – whims of the financing institutes. Almost all relevant evidence points to contents varying very strongly with the essential characteristics of the producing and/or distributing entity. Influences of specific business models and audience targeting impact content directly by laying down the outline of a series and by enabling or constraining certain messages and elements. The salience of the ideal type of the paymaster servant underlines the dominance of influences on this level. In addition, organization facets emerge – among the generic trans-medial categories of success factors – as the building block impacting the success of series the most. Another argument is that the varying

prominence of ideal types correlates with the broadcaster's business model, as discussed in 13.5. Creators usually do not get to select one out of many broadcasters with different business models, so it is most likely that the creators adapt their reasoning and discourse to an extent to the organization.

The differences between business models, in the US between advertising-based TV and pay-TV, and the respective influences on content of TV series are in literature frequently observed long-term tendencies. However, the last years bear witness to several outliers of the dominant pattern, where ad-based broadcasters (and in Europe PSBs) venture closer to the strategies, policies, production modes and (possibly societally relevant) content output of highly esteemed examples of pay-TV. The ad-based basic cable network AMC (*Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men*), and the ad-based broadcaster RTL 2 (*Deutschland 83*) highlight this trend. DR implemented the US pay-TV production mode decades ago and European (PSB) broadcasters, like the Swiss SRF, have taken the Danish broadcaster's lead. BBC cooperates closely in drama production with US pay-TV suppliers, so does RAI on occasion, and the German PSBs ZDF and ARD cooperate with Scandinavian (PSB) partners and various pay-TV channels. It must be noted that this converging of production modes is (apparently) induced by the high costs of the products and is confined to a (limited) number of high-end, prestigious drama productions, and does not include all in-house produced series of the broadcasters.

### **14.5. Exceptions to Hierarchy of Influences**

The hierarchical facet of the Shoemaker and Reese conceptual model (2014) is largely confirmed. Of any configurations of levels, the more macro level factors and the constellations that result from them as a rule constrain the room for the exertion of influences and decision-making on the more micro levels. However, already in the literature on the creation of series in the US industry, exceptions emerge. The routines and organization level constellations are (partly) shaped by influences of the individual. The influences on content of individual creators with tenure span on occasion several more macro levels of influences, yet the expansive exertion of individual power halts at financing.

In the data, several examples are found of head writers and developers, as well as inner decision-making circles, exerting influences on the content that superseded the supposedly stronger (contrary) influence of the broadcaster. Another example of reversing the conceptualized hierarchy that is often evidenced in the data is the influence of the strategy and performance of pay-TV suppliers (themselves enabled by new distribution technologies) on the media landscape. Developments originating on the organization level of influences impact the higher level of the social institution influences on media content, which in turn then exerts influence on the other organizations.



## **14.6. TV Series as People Business**

Organizations have evidently the strongest influence on many of the relevant features of the content of TV series. But organizations do not write, direct, compose, record, light, film, dress, act, build sets, search locations, pitch, develop, greenlight, schedule or keep books: people do. Most importantly, individual writers compose, literally speaking, a large share of the words in a script according to their preference. On a smaller share of the script, influences can be exerted by the inner circle of production and the liaisons to the commissioning clients. Developers are nominated by, and represent the broadcaster or production company, comply often to a large extent with the goals set by the organization, but still have crucial room to maneuver. In the data, creators see the practiced policies and series output of broadcasters changing with the heads of fiction, for example. A relatively strong tendency points to the influence exercised by the (professional) personas of the individual decision-makers at the various stages: producers, developers, supervisors, managers, and other functionaries. Despite all systemic tendencies evidenced in the data, the production of TV series remains a people business. The outcome of influences on content is to an extent not predictable, because it also depends on the (chemistry between) the involved people.

## **14.7. Invalid Bases for Decision-Making and Constraints**

Martin (2014, p. 85) argues that it is not the audience that opposes challenging contents, advertisers do. Von Rimscha and Siegert (2015, pp. 180-181) argue that decision-makers in media often base themselves on irrational instinct-based considerations. It stands to attention that in a high-risk industry with very costly products, audience research is not a very salient topic. If at all, it is mostly discussed in a negative way. Nevertheless, the demands, preferences and tastes of the construct audience are the killer argument of broadcasters in enabling and constraining content elements of TV series. Enabling the inclusion of certain content elements is at times perceived as a problem by creators but constraints of specific elements are prominent stumbling blocks. Audience considerations play a very big role to e.g., creators leaning towards the audience servant ideal type. Often, the core audiences are reduced to relatively superficial demographic features and averaged (e.g., the audience is 'not-urban and over 60', or it entails 'white women of 35') in communication by broadcasters to creators. The features are used to argue adaptations of content. In the same vein, creators that reason and act like the paymaster servant ideal type, adapt content and messages to what they assume the broadcaster wants or needs. Thus, they comply with requirements of a 'construct' broadcaster that seeks to comply with a 'construct' audience and obey in anticipation many (possibly illusory) guidelines. Furthermore, often, creators are in the dark about what the clients might want and are not able to even assume any priorities and direction on part of the broadcaster. The decision-making process is thus in various stages uninformed and heavily steered by possible misconceptions.

## 14.8. Probable Causes for Surge of TV Series

Media reports<sup>10</sup> mention investment provisions for original TV series of billions of US Dollars by established players like Netflix, Amazon, Disney and CBS as well as Apple, Google and Facebook who aim for a share of a market in products that are regarded as successfully binding consumers to suppliers and platforms. The upsurge of TV series in the last decades is not the object of this study. The triumphal procession of a classical TV format – during times when almost all traditional media suppliers and products are severely struggling – warrants closer inspection. A tentative answer can be distilled from the data of this study.

After heydays and notwithstanding some notable exceptions, TV series in the 70s and early 80s were once more regarded as a notoriously conservative, standardized and bland vehicle for providing advertisers of mass consumption goods with audiences. The few highlights of these years seem the result of competition-induced innovation by the one traditional US network with the smallest market shares at a given time - often NBC (Mittel, 2015). Important TV series on an expanded range of topics were also made by independent production companies that emerged as a result of anti-cartel regulation of the US TV industry (Lotz, 2014). As discussed in various subchapters, the proliferation of cable and satellite TV in the 80s/90s changed the industry and paved the way for pay-TV broadcasters serving smaller but valuable audiences with innovative TV series that strongly diverged in form, content and messages from the US ad-based TV fare. After another wave of proliferation of internet-based distribution technologies and another increase of suppliers, and thus competition, the drive towards tailor-made content for (new or uncatered) niche audiences induced a qualitative and quantitative expansion of the format and led to the present state in the TV series industry.

Once more deploying the conceptual model of Shoemaker and Reese (2014), factors that influence the surge of TV series can be located on the hierarchical levels. Technology-driven consumer capitalism defines the basic playing ground for the working on the more micro levels. The developments in the media/TV landscape (proliferation of technologies, channels, platforms, suppliers, and fragmentation of audiences) have been sketched often in this study. Deregulation of the media, unrestrained expansion and market monopolization by the big 'tech' players enlarge the available resources and options for new (web-based, distribution- and tech-affiliated) suppliers. Competition increases to record levels and pressures traditional TV series' suppliers further. The phase of ruinous competition (von Rimscha, Siegert, 2015, pp. 87-88) might, in this case pertaining to production costs and audience revenues, be reached for the legacy media organizations that produce TV series as well as (before long) for Netflix, HBO, Showtime and other specialized producers/distributors, but not for the omnivorous 'big tech' players. The role of broadcasters is often discussed in this study: in sum, the strategies of an ever-increasing number of suppliers lead to the production of more series, whereby the

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<sup>10</sup> New York Times, August 20, 2017: "Crowded TV marketplace gets ready for three tech giants". Fortune.com, July 8, 2018: "Netflix is expected to spend up to \$13 billion on original programming this year".

high-end products are strongly emphasized for prestige and suppliers' branding reasons. Although certain players might lose market shares and revenues, the total offer expands together with the total audience for serial fiction. This does, however, still not mean that every series finds an audience: the industry remains a business of many failures and some successes.

Pertaining to the most micro levels of the conceptual model, in my experience with interviewing numerous media workers, the creators of TV series stand out for a very strong focus on all facets of the content of their product. Large portions of the interviews were dedicated to what is told, how it is told, how new it is, how it surprises, what effect it should have, what quality of TV series and storytelling entails and how it is achieved, maintained and increased. To underline the importance: the ideal type of the crafter is entirely focused on the product, its content and the processes that evoke high quality of TV series and is the most prominent of the ideal types. The other product-oriented ideal type, the artist, is also salient. Together, they are by and large as present as the other four ideal types combined. The latter ideal types view TV series more as a means to an end (the salesperson – selling, the messenger – mediating, the audience and the paymaster servant – satisfying stakeholders). The meta-category of success content and the success factor quality are also very salient.

Thus, in overview, the surge of TV series is to an extent caused by variations of an economic system favoring technology and consumption, by a TV landscape that entails the technological foundation, regulatory leeway and market size for a number of increasingly well-funded players who engage in extremely intense competition to attract and retain sufficiently large shares of an expanding but increasingly fragmenting audience. The suppliers are – in the most productive and best cases – enticed to innovate, take risks and generate awareness regarding form and content of products, to improve their market position. And, finally, this surge is also caused by close-knit teams of highly motivated and competent creators for whom integrity of content and processes, communication, quality, innovation, risk, uniqueness, relevance but also entertainment, commodification and adaption to revenue sources take center-stage.

## **14.9. Limitations and Further Research**

The largest limitation of this present study stems from its explorative, qualitative nature. Generalizations beyond the sample are thus in principle pre-empted. It is nevertheless important to note that in the time period of the research – 2016-2018 – a fair to large share of the domestically produced TV series in countries with a smaller output of products (e.g., Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy) is discussed by the interviewees. The findings thus potentially apply to these national TV series' industries. On the other hand, the analysis method QCA is deterministic (Ragin, 2014) and is deployed to investigate societal relevance as a factor contributing to audience success of series as perceived by the creators. The QCA findings are thus

limited to the present sample. Schneider and Wagemann (2012) suggest formulating hypotheses based on the results of QCA and testing these with the appropriate methods.

Interviews are a data gathering method with advantages as well as disadvantages. Interview data are (also) the product of chemistry in the dialogue between interviewer and participant. Rapley (2001, p. 303) states: "The 'data' obtained are highly dependent on, and emerge from, the specific local interactional context which is produced in and through the talk (and related identity work) of the interviewee and interviewer." The distortion caused by the involvement of the interviewer cannot be entirely eradicated. Seidman (2015, p. 41) poses the question of whose meaning is arrived at in interviews. Recognizing that meaning is a product of interaction is one step towards minimizing the distortion. I instigated the interview and set the overall agenda of the conversation. The participants then elaborated on topics to varying extents and interpreted the meaning of their experiences. In the analysis, I only compare the prominence of subtopics within, but not between the main topical categories. I tried to overcome an overestimation of the importance of societal relevance by discussing other success factors in some detail as well. There is no evidence for, and no reason to assume that, any extraordinarily large structural influence of the interviewer on positional interpretations of experiences.

The respondents' answers are (sometimes after insistent probing) regarded as credible and taken at face value. However, Rapley (2001) and Martin (1990) uncover flaws in registering discourse. The former argues successfully for transcribing interviews in much greater detail and incorporating in evidence the full dialogue, the tonality, silences, breaks, hesitations, breathing, inadvertent sounds, etc. Martin (1990) provides an example of deconstruction of a discourse and exposes the covered meanings. Both strategies are valuable and essential in analyzing recounts of socially controversial, painful or embarrassing subjects. This study, however, casts a wide net in exploring professional and only limitedly emotional or personal issues. Any perceived risks to the reputation of participants were preempted. Thus, the subject of the present study does not warrant the methods proposed by Rapley (2001) and Martin (1990). The work of the authors, however, did inspire in-depth inspection of the statements.

A further limitation of this study lies in the nature of the perception of influences by practitioners in the TV series industry. Writers, producers, and developers possibly exaggerate their own roles in the creation of content. Roberts (2010, p. 771) infers that retaining employment domineers the players' agendas. I tried to prevent this problem with a strategic introduction (see 8.2.) and I circumvented this potential bias in the data of this study by counterchecking and filtering out obvious self-promotional statements. A (hopefully small) degree of doubt remains. A potentially larger problem, pertaining to the validity of findings on societal relevance, lies in the mandates of PSBs. Often, social responsibility of the broadcasters and societal relevance of the program are prescribed, foremost pertaining to the diversity in the mediation of voices in the program, less to the content of specific products. It then becomes an organizationally desirable answer to

emphasize societal relevance. I tried to circumvent the distortion by elaborating and asking for concrete examples where I felt that respondents merely paid lip service to societal relevance.

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) distinguish the dominant facets per level of influences of the “Hierarchy of Influences” model. On the more abstract social system and social institution levels, the emerging patterns show an overlap with the influences summarized and labelled by Shoemaker and Reese. On the meso and micro levels of influences on the content of TV series of organizations, routines and individuals, the emerging dominant patterns diverge from Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) conceptualized factors. Here, the difference in nature of the product and organization of the production between TV series and journalism surface. The emerging patterns on the organization level can be cross-sectioned with the influences of Shoemaker and Reese but diverge from the conceptual factors and must be summarized and categorized under other labels. It shows that the TV series production and distribution organizations have features that cannot easily be aligned with features of media organizations ‘in general’ and with the news/information sector more specifically. Regarding the organization of production, one difference is the large variation in development and production routes within the rather ephemeral and people-centered creation of TV series. Development of TV series is often instigated by creatives, who start or own a (project-based or semi-permanent) company, which introduces the original idea, outlines, scripts or pilots to a production company, or proposes the execution of the project directly to distributors or broadcasters: larger organizations capable of financing multi-episodic series. In a reversal of the process, however, distributors or broadcasters can also be the initiators of series. For example, when a broadcaster needs a new TV series and mandates the ‘right’ creators, writers, producers, directors. A practice common to cinema, and to some extent to TV series, is talent agents or managers composing a package (consisting of e.g., an idea or a script, writers, producers, and possibly distributors committed to the project), which is then pitched to financing entities.

On the routines level, the domain of influence of content suppliers of TV series needs to be interpreted entirely differently and the discussion then evolves around the purchasing organization and the individual creators or teams as suppliers. Due to the nature of the research and the data gathering method, a fair share of the conceptual influences on the individual level are not investigated: personal backgrounds, opinions, attitudes, values, etc. shimmer through in the interviews but are mainly beyond the scope of a profession- and product-related interview. Further research ought to focus stronger on gatekeeping in audio-visual (multi-episodic) fiction, in an attempt to further clarify the processes, as well as the similarities and differences to news production. In addition, further research might include additional commercial/business functionaries and creators of TV series from other countries and markets. The sample of future research is preferably more balanced with respect to roles/functions, countries, and commissioning broadcasters.

Hanitzsch et al. (2010) found patterns in the data of their (quantitative) survey of 1700 journalists from seventeen countries. These patterns intersect the conceptual

models of levels of influences deployed in this study. Their analysis reveals a “dimensional structure of six distinct domains – political, economic, organizational, professional, and procedural influences” (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 5). In future studies, these domains can complement or be intertwined more strongly with the deployment of the conceptual models of influences and inform further on the decision-making on serial fiction and other media products.

Redvall (2013, p. 22) states: “while the humanities (...) emphasize the text over practice, the social sciences tend not to include the text, or the product, in the analysis.” As stated in 1.4.7., the (political) direction and extent of a bias in societally relevant content is a very important topic that this present study could, due to the research design and data collection method, not sufficiently tackle. There are abundant reasons to suspect that conservative or status quo-confirming messages are the most systematically amplified outcome of the constraining and enabling influences on content (cf. McQuail, 2010, Hesmondhalg, 2012). In the same vein, the hurdles for criticism of the capitalist system as mediated in *The Wire* are likely to be higher than for allegedly moderate conservative/liberal messages. Shoemaker and Reese (2014, pp. 75-77) observe that the media determine boundaries of a) which ideas, actions, and behaviors conform to the consensus, b) which are still within legitimate controversy, and c) which are deviant, outside the bandwidth of the legitimate. This would be to an extent acceptable if the sketched gatekeeping processes were located in the middle of the progressive/emancipatory/open versus conservative/repressive/closed spectrum. It is, however, my impression that it is skewed towards the latter side of the socio-political arena. To add insult to injury, discriminatory, unjustly meritocratic and oppressive messages are often mis-sold by communicators as apolitical, value-free entertainment. Further research thus ought to focus on the triangulation of the analysis of perceptions of creators with content analysis of relevant characteristics in the creators’ actual TV series. In addition, a study focusing on the content of ideas and scripts rejected by financiers would shed light on systemic (political) bias in greenlighting new series.

The breakneck speed of the developments in the global TV series’ industry evokes follow-up research into the industry and its products. In the Sunday supplements of certain crisis-ridden legacy media, the format of TV series is declared passé. The ever-increasing engagement with the format by extremely well-endowed investors, producers, distributors and broadcasters, however, speaks a different language.

## 14.10. Epilogue

To come full circle in this study, the question whether I can look forward to another series like *The Wire* still needs an answer that can only be of speculative nature. Based on all evidence presented in this study, it is not very likely that, in Europe, a series that mediates radical leftist criticism of the dominant political-economic societal order will be produced soon. Neither the discerned influences on

content, nor the opinions of creators on what constitutes societally relevant evoke the conclusion that the leeway and potential for fundamental criticism of the 'system' is large. Even where chances for open goals are offered, the outcomes are, regarding mediation of corroborated and heartfelt critical messages, disappointing. The acclaimed German series *Bad Banks* and *Babylon Berlin*, for example, touch upon highly contentious socio-political topics but the creators refrain in the former series from any - since 2008 rather self-evident - comprehensive criticism of the finance industry. Further, in the latter series, the creators refrain from taking a stance in the depicted struggle between Nazis and the left in the Weimar republic: an equally self-evident positioning, since crypto-fascists have entered the German parliament in hordes. In both series, an increasingly moldy blanket of well-acted but nevertheless clichéd personal stories suffocates any relevance. The series thus produce own goals induced by fear of the courage of one's own convictions. In Scandinavian series, observers from other countries, where for example women are more marginalized in work and in public life than in Scandinavia, are the ones who perceive the radicalism of messages (gender roles, etc.). Within Scandinavia, the messages are largely not seen as far-reaching or as controversial for the mainstream. Some hope of relevant (and good) serial fiction can be invested in the UK and the US industries, due to the larger output (in numbers of produced TV series) and broadcasters that on occasion (inadvertently) let riskier content slip through. Broadcasters are not averse to controversy about their products. Netflix will not have been unhappy with the spiraling debate on *Thirteen Reasons Why*. In addition, there are creators with strong opinions on matters beyond their art and craft, as shown on occasion in the literature and the data of the present study. The probability of socio-politically or -culturally radical fiction thus seems somewhat higher. Series like *The Thick of It* in the past, or, more recently, *Black Earth Rising* and *Home* illustrate the critical and debate-provoking potential of TV series. Maybe *The Wire* is not a black swan after all.

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## Appendices

### 1. Semi-structured Questionnaire

#### Questionnaire Respondent X

1. *Introduction interviewer, topic, goals (thesis)*
2. *Availability, permission to record*
3. *Clarification*

"This is an expert interview. It is like a conversation, a dialogue. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to talk to you because you are a renowned creator/expert of TV series, you were/oversee/involved in/author, producer, developer of XXX".

*Start recording*

4. *Recruitment: identity, role/function at series/company, career, previous projects, jobs.*

"Starting point is your role at XXX, but obviously we are also interested in previous experiences and in general in your insight in TV series. No data, quotes or names of interview partners are handed on to third parties. Direct quotes are only incorporated if permitted by you. The data are used for scientific goals and publications. The report can be sent to you".

#### Questions

*Note: all topics and questions are first introduced, explained and exemplified. If required, answers are followed by requests for elaboration and/or generalization. Below, under points 1 to 15, a selection of questions is rendered. The deployed questions varied with the course of the conversation, and were adapted to language skills, function, background, career, and TV series, etc. of the interviewee.*

#### 1. *Spontaneous reply*

What, in your opinion, contributes most to success of TV Series? What limits the success of TV series?

#### 2. *General questions for flow*

How did the series X come about? What was your inspiration/motivation? What are you (and others) trying to achieve with TV series (X)? What is the most important facet of the series to you? Can you describe the content, central plot, story arches? Can you describe the realization process? What went well in the process and what not? Who was important in the production team? Who put the team/crew together and how? What were the biggest problems in creating the series? When and by whom were you paid? Are you satisfied with the product? What would you have done differently? Which circumstances were helpful?

### **3. Societal relevance**

Are societal relevance, socio-political commentary, political content a success factor? *Elaboration questions, e.g.,* are we talking about pol. decision making processes, policies, institutions? Is the depiction of realistic political actors, powerful people, state agents (police, law and order) attractive? Is referring to social issues a success factor? (*Many social and controversial topics discussed, e.g., immigration, cost of living, poverty, work-life balance, education, unemployment, corruption*). Is it important for audience reach, for the success of programs that series are set in the present, display real existing events, places, actors, institutions? In how far is it important that local dialect is used? In how far does depiction of societal developments contribute to success of series? Do you feel that societal relevance is important for series of broadcaster XXX (*type*)?

### **4. Content**

#### **a) Genre, content, program**

*Ask for genre and description of content.*

How important is the genre for success of TV series? How important is actual content for success of series? What makes the content special, stand out?

How relevant is the actual content of a series in comparison to the concept of it?

*Examples.* Broadcasters stands for a certain kind of programs in the eyes of some people. How important is it that TV series fit the program of the broadcasters?

#### **b) Diversity, novelty, quality**

(*Mainly for developers and experts*) Is it for broadcasters important to offer a diversity of series. (*writers, producers*) Is this diversity important for audience reach, for success of fiction in total? Does one try to establish in series a mix of genres, themes? Often there is talk of quality of TV series, it is even used as a genre as in QTV. How do you judge the quality of TV series? How important is so-called quality in general for success of series? For your series? In how far can TV series be innovative? Do they have to be for success? How important is the degree of tradition, compared to innovation, for success of TV series?

#### **c) Target audiences**

What is the audience of series XXX? Can you describe them? In your experience, do you (and/or creators) specify a target audience while developing and producing? What is the target audience? What do you know about it? Where do you get this info? How refined is the target group specification? Is the audience distinguished along different characteristics? How important is the target audience definition for success of the TV series? Are TV series and creators subjected to demands by broadcasters regarding target audiences? Is the audience limited by time-slot or other sender-organizational requirements? Do you take regional considerations into account? Do you and other decision makers try to establish a local regional appeal in production of fiction?

#### **5. *Integration of recipients, audience and advertisers' considerations, resonance***

Do you integrate (opinions of) viewers in the development and production of the TV series? In how far did potential viewers cooperate with producers of the TV series? In how far are attitudes, assessments by audience members taken into consideration at production of the TV series? Do you and/or the broadcaster do audience tests? Do creators (systematically) incorporate the feedback to previous products in new ones? Are advertisers needs made out and/or taken into consideration? How important are word of mouth and fan communities for success of a series?

#### **6. *Aesthetic aspects***

What meaning do aesthetic/formal aspects for the success of TV series? Technical quality, production value? Is it important to maintain a certain look throughout the series? Do you think in terms of coherence, consistency of the form? Do you have to take requirements and demands of broadcasters regarding form in consideration? In how far do aesthetic aspects (a good 'look' or 'form') contribute to success of series?

#### **7. *Human Resources***

To what extent are reputable artists (*all creative types mentioned*) or stars involved? How important are the aforementioned for success of the series? Do reputations play a role for the marketing of the series? For the greenlighting? We talked about stars, but productions also depend on the other people involved. Which roles are essential? How replaceable is the production staff? What role do the competences of the people involved play? How important is this for success? And the motivation of the people involved? How does one communicate in the production team? In how far does HR management contribute to success of series? Who decides on hiring and firing of crew? Is this of importance for the success?

#### **8. *Leadership***

The crew and cast also needs to be guided, managed. What meaning does management have in the TV series, in general? How much creative room do the involved people have? Who instigated the series, project(s)? Does it require people with special competences who push the TV series project forward? Does it require someone with authority, management competence who pushes the project? Does the series have (enough) support of the organization's management? In general, how important is leadership for the success of series?

#### **9. *Internal process management***

To your knowledge, do broadcasters, or distributors specify requirements how the production process should be carried out? How are TV series managed? Does it differ per broadcaster, per series? How does one assure that all the involved staff

and crew members share the same vision of the product, that share the same goals? Is a concept, a goal communicated? How? Is this a success factor? Was the budget large enough to do what you intended? Is the budget size a success factor for series?

### **10. Distribution**

Where is the series broadcasted? In how far does success depend on the distribution of TV series? What role does the timing, for example, the broadcasting time-slot play for the success? Is the series distributed over different platforms? What role does multi-channel distribution play for success of the series?

### **11. Marketing**

Which aspects are important in the marketing of the TV series? In how far is the market positioning important? How do you position the series? Is advertising for TV series important? What is the importance of trailers for the series? Of festivals? For audiences or for distribution? Are there many different strategies for different series? What evokes the different strategies? What are they based on? What role do word of mouth and social media play in the marketing of series? How important is cross-media marketing for series? In how far play multi-media and cross-selling a role? In how far is the broadcaster's brand important for the marketing? In how far is it important that TV series fit to the brand of the broadcasters? In how far do you recognize synergy potential at series? (*sequels, spin-offs, attributes*)

### **12. Organization/broadcaster**

Series are all made (financed, produced, commissioned, etc.) by an organization, e.g., the broadcaster. What role does this play? Which dis/-advantages do you see for the series being a product of the broadcaster? Regarding budget, resources, networks, cooperation, etc.? (*if not discussed before*) What role does the broadcaster's management play at the series? In how far was there support? What kind of support?

### **13. External evaluation:**

TV series are assessed by the outside world. How important is this for success? What role do reviews, awards play? How important are these for audience success? Is it a goal to get good reviews and win prizes with series? What about festivals? Viewers communicate about the series they watch. Do you observe the resonance, buzz, follow-up communication on series? Is this form of resonance important for success?

### **14. Environment orientation:**

TV series are not produced in a world, an environment. In how far does the environment orientation play a role for series, pertaining to industry, sector and TV series' developments and phenomena? In how far do you follow (domestic)

societal developments for your work in TV series? In how far do you/other creators follow competitors while engaging in development/production/marketing? What role does the observation of innovations play a role in the production of series?

**15. End:**

Did we leave out any success factors of TV series? To summarize, which are the crucial success factors?

## 2. Codebook

Codebook				
Cat.	2nd level code	3rd level code	4th level code	5th level code
(A) Influences on content of TV series				
Social system level influences				
	economic			
	political			
	cultural			
	Ideological			
Social institution level influences				
	Advertisers			
	Audience use patterns			
	Financiers			
	Media policy			
	State control, regulatory measures			
	Proliferation of platforms			
	Media landscape			
Organization level influences				
	Competition			

	Advertisers influence			
		Considered		
		Experienced		
	Defined target audience			
		Mainstream		
		Elite / niche		
	Budget size			
		Completely insufficient		
		Meager		
		Sufficient		
		Good		
	Economic viability			
		High		
		Medium		
		Low		
	Bureaucracy			
	Interaction with other organizations			
		Co-production		
		Co-financing		
	Goals			
		Audience share		
		Mandate		
		Profit		
	Policies, rules			
	Ownership			
	Business model			
		ad-based		
		PSB		
		pay-Tv		
	Business model of...			
		Client		
		Own organization		
Routines level influences				
	Sources, suppliers			



		Film		
		Theater		
		Adaptations		
		Sequels, Spin-Offs		
		Comic strip		
		History		
		Real event		
		Novel		
		TV script		
		Original series		
	Audience needs/narrative space: genre, format			
		Serial		
		More than one season		
	Genre & type			
		dramedie		
		comedy		
		drama		
		genre		
		women		
		x-mas		
		war		
		fantasy		
		sitcom		
		western		
		workplace		
		lifeworld		
		procedural law		
		Crime		
		SF		
	Organization of creation			
		Interference		
			Circle	
			Advertisers	
			Commissioners	
		Inner production circle		
			Other	
			Commissioners	
			Producers	
			Writers room	

		Distance to org.		
			Not in org. integrated	
			Integrated	
Individual Influences				
	Career			
		Experience		
			>20	
			>10	
			6-10	
			<5	
	Country			
		NOR		
		CAN		
		I		
		B		
		SW		
		NL		
		DK		
		UK		
		D		
		CH		
	Professional			
		Decision making/ influence estimate		
			High	
			mid	
			Low	
	Income			
		Low income		
		Mid income		
		High income		
	Role/Function			
		Director		
		Procurement		
		Showrunner		
		Head writer		
		Expert		
		Editor		
		Commissioner		
		Developer		
		Producer		
		Writer		
	Royalties			
		No royalties		
		Royalties		

	Income			
		Lump sum fee		
		Project-based wage		
		Fixed income		
	Contract			
		Independent		
		Broadcaster		
		Prod. Comp.		
	(Previous) employer/customer			
		PSB		
		Ad-based		
		Pay-TV		
	Prof attitudes			
		Aim/motivation for creation		
			Audience	
				Other
				Titillation/excitement/tension
				Entertainment/relief
				Discourse
			Status/reputation	
				Audience
				Client
				Peers
			Employment securing	
			Income/fees	
			Craft/skills/profession	
			Communication	
			Art/expression	
			Gratification	
				Commissioner, client
				Peers
				Audience
				Personal

	Societal attitudes (researcher's assessment)			
		Societal issues mention		
			Power	
			Inequality	
			Dystopia	
			Europe	
			Local issue	
			Health	
			War/violence	
			Environment	
			Populism	
			Nationalism	
			Income distribution	
			Immigration & refugees	
			Capitalism	
			Sexuality	
			Ethnicity	
			Class	
			Gender roles	
			Conservative- progressive (1-3)	
<b>(B) Success factors of TV series</b>				
Success of TV series				
	Advertising market success			
	Audience success numbers			
	Audience success ratings			
	Audience success feedback			
	Profit			
	Profit organization			

	Reputation organization			
	Reputation self			
	Reputation among peers			
	Other			
	Low success			
	Medium success			
	High success			
Human resources				
	Coherence			
	Competence			
	Experience			
	Motivation			
	Reputation			
	Hidden brand			
Environmental orientation				
	Regional reference			
	Language			
	Competitors			
	Societal reference, Zeitgeist			
Leadership				
	Star power			
	Trade competence promotor			
	Management			
	Power promotor			
Internal processes				
	Processes			
	Resources			
	Hidden brand			
	Innovation			
	Recipients integration			

	Communication (brand)			
	Product budget			
Form/design				
	Fit form / content			
	Consistency			
	Quality			
External evaluation				
	Media coverage			
	Word of mouth			
	Awards			
	Reviews			
Content				
	Diversity			
	Exclusivity			
	Quality			
	Novelty			
	Credibility			
	Content and target audience (limitations)			
	Authors, stars			
	Genre, format, content			
	Fit to program			
	Cultural proximity (about dom. audience)			
Distribution				
	Multi-Platform			
	Timing			
	Audience optimization			
Marketing				
	Advertising			
	Target audience			
	Brand			
	MAR weight			
	Advertising market			

	Positioning			
	Price			
	Advertising market research			
	Audience market			
	Positioning			
	Price			
	Audience market research			
Organization aspects				
	Internal cooperation			
	External cooperation			
	Content Syndication			
	Budget			
	Support			
	Size			
	Network			
	Fit			
(C) Societal relevance as success factor of TV series				
Political content				
	State / government actors: law and order representatives			
	Professional politicians			
	Socio-political topics: political action			
	Pol. decision making processes			
Realistic style				
Escapism				
Realism				
	Historical and calendar events			

	Real actors and institutions			
	Real existing settings			
	Present, no time-lag			
	Social realism			
Local reference				
Main social segregators				
	Sexuality			
		Androgynous/transgender		
		sexless		
		bi		
		homo		
		hetero		
	Class			
		Under-class		
		Lower		
		Middle		
		Upper		
	Gender			
		Trans		
		Females		
		Males		
	Ethnicity /nationality			
		Islam other non-west religions		
		Eurocentric anxiety		
		Non-whites		
		Minorities		
		'Foreigners'		
		Refugees, asylum seekers		
Controversial topics				
	Abuse of children			
	Dystopia, tech			
	War			
	Nationalism, nationality			



	Treatment of elderly			
	Loss of home			
	Domestic violence			
	Migration			
	Law & order			
	Violent crime, perpetrators			
	Violent crime, victims			
	Non-violent crime, perps			
	Non-violent crime, victims			
	Poverty, inequality			
	Injustice			
	Death			
	Hard drugs dealing			
	Hard drugs consumption			
	Soft drugs consumption			
	Soft drugs dealing			
	Alcohol abuse			
	Illegal sexual activities			
	Promiscuity			
	Prostitution			
	Gambling			
	Left pol. deviance			
	Right pol. deviance			
	Terrorism			
	White collar crime, finance, fraud			
	Religion, sects			

	Environment, climate change, pollution			
	Company profits, commercialization, neo-liberalism			
	Big city environment pos			
	Big city environment neg			
	Suburb pos			
	Suburb neg			
	Rural neg			
	Rural pos			
	Trials and tribulations of elite			
	Deviance from petit-bourgeois norms, values			
	'Human needs'			
	'Human issues'			
	'Social issues'			
	'Socio-political issues'			
Societal relevance is success factor				
	Classical human topos/truism			
	2nd story			
	Appeal to audience segment			
	Appeal to commissioning org.			
	Appeal to peers			
	Personal expression			
	Identification, involvement, engagement of recipients			
	PSB mandate			

	Orientation/information/education			
	Storytelling essence			
	Other			
<b>(D) Ideal types of creators</b>				
<b>Ideal types</b>				
	Audience servant			
	Crafter			
	Salesperson			
	Messenger			
	Paymaster servant			
	Artist			

### 3. Reliability Test

Interview ID, number of statements & tested statements	Categories		Second level codes	
	Agree	Differ	Agree	Differ
ID 1 (250), 35-60				
36/37	1	1	1	1
38/39	1		1	
40/41	3		4	2
43	1	1		2
44/47	3		3	1
ID 2 (300), 90-120				
87/94	5	2	1	1
100/102	1		1	
103	1		1	
104/110	4	1	2	1
109/110		1		
112/113	2		1	1
118/119	1	1		1
119/129	3	1	3	1
ID 3 (400) 260-300				
260/264	2	1	2	
266/269		1		
270/274	2		1	
281/282	3		3	
285/287	3	1	2	1
293	2	1	2	1

297/302	1			
ID 4 (320), 150-180				
143/150	3	1	3	1
152	1		1	
154/155	1			
156/157	4	1	4	1
164/166	3	1	1	1
173/175	2	1		
180/182	4		2	1
<i>Continued</i>				
Total	583	146	385	103
Total agree & differ		729	488	
<b>Agree percent</b>	0.79972565		0.78893443	

## 4. Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is in this study deployed to substantiate the findings on the perceived contribution of societal relevance to success of the creators' TV series. QCA bridges qualitative and quantitative methods, bases on set-theory and enables the analysis of causal complexity (as in the data of this study) by allowing multiple conjunctural causation. Meta-categories of success factors of TV series are not regarded as competing in impact on the dependent variable 'high' success but may intersect in varying combinations to achieve the outcome of high success (cf. Ragin, 2014; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012; Thomann, 2015). QCA allows determining necessary and sufficient meta-categories of success factors. A factor is necessary for success if in all cases with high success, the (strong/good) success factor is present. Analysis of sufficiency bases on a truth table, i.e., a matrix with all combinations of coinciding meta-categories and the respective extent of success as outcome. A sufficient combination of meta-categories leads to the outcome but is not the only path to success.

Based on Ragin (2014, p. xxvi), this study's QCA research design elements are compared to better-known analysis methods, see Table 5.

In deploying QCA several (robustness) procedures validate the results (cf. Schneider and Wagemann, 2010, 2012). Regarding internal validity, I tested different calibrations of the success factors and success as well as various truth table inclusion thresholds. Necessity and sufficiency tests were separate and deployed also for the absence of high success. I recount in subchapter 14.3 which cases show the varying routes to success.

The parameters are acceptable. Consistency expresses the degree to which a relation of necessity or sufficiency between a (combination of) success factor(s) and the outcome (perceived high audience success) is met, similar to significance in statistical models. Consistency values range from 0 (no consistency) to 1 (perfect consistency). After establishing a relation of necessity or sufficiency, the parameter

coverage expresses the empirical relevance, similar to the explained variance contribution. Coverage (between 0 and 1) expresses the relation of the size of the overlap of sets to the larger set.

*Table 5. Comparison of research design elements*

<b>Conventional methods</b>	<b>QCA</b>	<b>Application in present study</b>
Variables	Sets	Sets of well-achieved success factors
Cases show degree in variables	Cases show membership in sets of conditions	Cases have membership score in sets of well-achieved success factors and high success
Measurement	Calibration	Three qualitative anchors (between 0 and 1) are assigned to 6-point Likert scale scores of success factors and success
Dependent variable	Qualitative outcome	High audience market success perceived by respondent
Given population	Constructed population	Sample of 32 TV series' creators and 3 experts
Correlations	Set-theoretic relation: necessity	Where high success is present, the strong success factor is present - the factor is a superset of success
	Set-theoretic relation: sufficiency	The strong success factor (or combination) leads to success, but so do other factors - the factor is a subset of success
Correlation matrices	Truth tables	Truth table
Significance	Consistency	Consistency
Explained variance contribution	Coverage	Coverage
Net effects	Causal recipes	One necessary success factor and four sufficient paths (combinations of intersecting success factors) in one solution model that leads to high success
Probabilistic	Deterministic	Identification of necessary conditions and paths to success, testable with conventional methods

### **a. Raw Data**

The data in the study at hand gathered from 32 creators of TV series from Western European countries and Canada were quantified. Index values per respondent were generated on a 6er Likert scale. The index values are based on the

combination of tendency (i.e. positive or negative for success of product, high success or not) and number of words in statements (weight) pertaining to eleven meta-categories of success factors and the outcome success.

*Table 6. Meta-categories of success in index values*

ID	Success	ENV	EXT	ORG	DIS	MAR	INT	LEA	HR	FOR	CON	SR
1	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	3	5	6	2
2	5	5	3	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	4
3	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	6	4
4	2	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	3
6	3.5	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	3
7	3.5	4	6	3	4	5	4	3	5	5	6	4
8	6	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	6	6
9	5.5	4	4	3	5	5	4	4	5	5	6	5
10	6	4	4	3	5	5	5	4	5	5	6	5
11	5	3	4	4	5	5	4	5	6	5	5	5
12	4	4	5	3	5	5	4	3	5	5	6	5
13	4	3	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	6	5
14	3	3	4	5	5	4	5	3	4	5	6	3
17	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5
18	3.5	5	5	3	5	5	3	4	4	4	6	4
19	4.5	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5
20	3.5	4	4	4	5	5	4	3	4	4	6	5
21	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	4
22	3	4	4	3	5	4	4	4	4	6	6	4
23	5.5	4	5	5	5	4	3	4	4	5	6	5
24	4.5	4	5	6	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	4
25	5	3	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	6	4
26	5.5	3	4	6	4	4	4	4	4	5	6	6
27	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	6	4
28	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	6	4
29	4.5	4	4	6	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5
30	5	3	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	4
31	5	4	3	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	4
32	4	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	6	5
33	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	5
34	4.5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	6	5
35	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	5

## b. Calibration

The calibration is guided by an inspection of literature and empirical studies. Considering the skewedness of the scores on the factors, to distinguish between the many cases with scores between 4 and 6 on the 6-point Likert scale, the calibration is

strict. The qualitative anchor 0.5, the crossover point between more in and more out of the set, is at 4.55. The interest goes out to ‘real important/good’ factors for ‘clear’ audience success.

*Table 7. Calibration*

	Qualitative anchors for (fuzzy) QCA scores		
	0	0.5	1
Conditions and outcome	Likert 6-point scale scores		
CON content	1.05	4.55	5.95
FOR: form/design			
MAR: marketing			
DIS: distribution			
SR: societal relevance			
ENV: environmental orientation			
ORG: organizational aspects			
INT: internal processes			
LEA: leadership			
HR: human resources			
EXT: external evaluation			
OUT: outcome: perceived high audience success			

### c. Analysis of Necessity

Only the condition (meta-category) ‘good’ content (CON) is necessary for success with a consistency of necessity score of over 0.9. The next best conditions are the other product-related ones: high societal relevance (SR), good form (FOR), distribution (DIS) and marketing (MAR). No ‘good’ factor is necessary for the absence of the outcome high audience success. The low relevance of necessity of the factor CON indicates that the condition is almost, but not completely, trivial.

In Boolean notation, necessity for high success reads:  $CON \leftarrow OUT$ .

*Table 8. Analysis of necessity*

	Consistency of Necessity	Coverage of Necessity	Relevance of Necessity
ENV	0.621	0.87	0.915
EXT	0.718	0.807	0.828

ORG	0.707	0.823	0.849
DIS	0.824	0.78	0.739
MAR	0.728	0.83	0.849
INT	0.681	0.81	0.845
LEA	0.701	0.912	0.934
HR	0.727	0.826	0.845
FOR	0.854	0.8	0.752
<b>CON</b>	<b>0.993</b>	<b>0.668</b>	<b>0.316</b>
SR	0.884	0.811	0.752
~ENV	0.804	0.804	0.784
~EXT	0.692	0.839	0.87
~ORG	0.674	0.788	0.826
~DIS	0.586	0.89	0.936
~MAR	0.709	0.847	0.872
~INT	0.739	0.846	0.862
~LEA	0.727	0.769	0.779
~HR	0.693	0.831	0.862
~FOR	0.55	0.85	0.917
~CON	0.219	0.959	0.994
~SR	0.515	0.825	0.909

#### d. Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis

The truth table entails the configurations of present and absent ‘good’ conditions with the present or absent outcome of perceived high audience success. Configurations of factors with sufficiency inclusion scores of 0.935 and higher are consistent with the statement of sufficiency for success. The proportional reduction in inconsistency is a parameter for consistency of fuzzy sets and expresses in how far the configuration is a subset of the outcome as well as of the absent outcome and is acceptable for the rows qualified as consistent (OUT = 1). Based on this, the configurations are consistent with the statement of sufficiency for high success.

Table 9. Truth table

	CON	FOR	MAR	DIS	SR	OUT	Cases n	Sufficiency Inclusion Score	Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency
22	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0.975	0.871
19	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.973	0.837



29	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0.956	0.75
18	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.951	0.736
26	1	1	0	0	1	1	4	0.942	0.787
23	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0.938	0.641
28	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	0.935	0.804
20	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	0.934	0.72
30	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	0.931	0.735
25	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.929	0.578
24	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	0.922	0.669
32	1	1	1	1	1	0	4	0.911	0.76
31	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0.9	0.542
27	1	1	0	1	0	0	4	0.885	0.531
1	0	0	0	0	0	?	0	-	-

Further rows display the remaining configurations of present and absent factors with an unknown outcome (OUT =?), and no cases, n = 0.

### e. Sufficiency Solution

A sufficient solution model is arrived at (Table 10). The intermediate solution builds in a theoretically posed (in this case positive) directional influence of the success factors on the outcome success and is usually the preferred solution. The standard analysis renders the same results as the enhanced standard analysis (cf. Schneider & Wagemann, 2012)

In Boolean notation the sufficient solution reads:

*Path A:* CON\*for\*dis\*SR +

*Path B:* CON\*for\*DIS\*sr +

*Path C:* CON\*FOR\*mar\*SR +

*Path D:* CON\*FOR\*MAR\*dis\*sr → OUT

Table 10. Sufficiency solution model

Path	Intersecting Factors (PRESENT/absent)	Sufficiency Inclusion Score	Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency	Suff. Coverage	Unique Coverage
A	CON*for*dis*SR	0.953	0.78	0.475	0.021
B	CON*for*DIS*sr	0.94	0.688	0.449	0.016
C	CON*FOR*mar*SR	0.924	0.797	0.648	0.18
D	CON*FOR*MAR*dis*sr	0.956	0.75	0.457	0.018
	Solution Model	0.897	0.763	0.706	

The parsimonious solution (that includes all logical remainders that yield simpler recipes) is provided to reflect and reads in Boolean notation:

$$\text{CON*for*dis} + \text{CON*for*sr} + \text{CON*FOR*mar*SR} + \text{CON*MAR*dis*sr} \rightarrow \text{OUT}$$



### **Erklärung**

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass die Dissertation von mir selbst ohne unerlaubte Beihilfe verfasst worden ist und diese Dissertation noch an keiner anderen Fakultät eingereicht wurde.

Ort und Datum

Unterschrift

Zürich 13. Februar 2019

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- |                   |   |
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| 11/2016 – present | PhD student, research and teaching associate at the Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research, Department of Media Economics and Management, University of Zurich (Prof. Dr. Gabriele Siebert)   |
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